Comparing populist communication across media channels: How political actors utilize populist messages and styles

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Abstract

Populism is one of the most pressing and thriving political issues in current democracies, as populist actors are extremely successful around the globe and increasing in importance. This has raised scholarly concerns to discuss this development also from a communication science perspective and explain the relation of political actors and their utilization of populist communication elements. This thesis answers two major research aims by first providing a conceptualization and operationalization of populist communication that combines and integrates both ideology-centered and discourse-centered definitions of populism and arguing that populist communication is a combination of ideology and style. By comparing the utilization of populist communication across different media channels, a variety of political actors and different political issues, this thesis secondly investigates and explains who expresses the populist messages and styles and to what extent populist communication is spread. With five comparative studies and the overarching synopsis, this thesis demonstrates that populist communication is especially dependent on certain opportunity structures and flourishes when populism affine factors, such as social media communication, party extremism or a high affinity to populism related issues, are combined.

Zusammenfassung

Populismus ist eine der dringlichsten und relevantesten politischen Fragen in zeitgenössischen Demokratien, da populistische Akteure weltweit äusserst erfolgreich sind und immer mehr an Bedeutung gewinnen. Dies hat wissenschaftliche Bedenken aufkommen lassen, diesen Anstieg auch aus einer kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Perspektive zu diskutieren und das Verhältnis politischer Akteure und deren Nutzung populistischer Kommunikationselemente zu erklären. Diese Dissertation beantwortet zwei wichtige Forschungsziele, indem sie zunächst eine Konzeptualisierung und Operationalisierung der populistischen Kommunikation anbietet, die sowohl ideologiezentrierte als auch diskurszentrierte Definitionen von Populismus kombiniert und integriert, und argumentiert, dass populistische Kommunikation eine Kombination aus Ideologie und Stil ist. Durch den Vergleich der Nutzung populistischer Kommunikation über mehrere Medienkanäle, verschiedene politische Akteure und unterschiedliche politische Themen untersucht und erklärt die Dissertation zweitens, wer populistische Botschaften und Stile verwendet und inwieweit populistische Kommunikation verbreitet wird. Mit fünf vergleichenden Studien und der übergreifenden Synopse zeigt diese Dissertation, dass populistische Kommunikation von bestimmten Opportunitätsstrukturen abhängig ist und besonders floriert, wenn Populismus-affine Faktoren, wie Social Media Kommunikation, Parteiextremismus oder eine hohe Affinität zu populistischen Themen kombiniert werden.

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For my family

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Preamble

This doctoral thesis comprises five articles published in peer reviewed scholarly journals and a synopsis. ***Article I*** (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017) qualitatively details how politicians in four countries use fragments of populist communication elements on social media. ***Article II*** (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017) examines how extreme and opposition parties use populist key messages on social media in six countries and contrasts Facebook and Twitter. ***Article III*** (Ernst, Engesser, & Esser, 2017) investigates the special Swiss case and explores the utilization of people-centrism and anti-elitism by left- and right-wing parties on social media. ***Article IV*** (Ernst, Blassnig, Büchel, Engesser, & Esser, 2019) systematizes populist-related communication styles, compares the utilization of populism-related communication across social media and political talk shows in six countries, and contrasts challenger and extreme parties. ***Article V*** (Ernst, Esser, Blassnig, & Engesser, 2019) explores the co-occurrence of populist messages and styles over four media channels (talk shows, Facebook, Twitter, and newspapers) in six countries and compares fourteen often-raised political topics, members of populist parties and backbenchers. Finally, the present ***Synopsis***, highlights the context and relevance of populist communication, presents the overarching research questions along with the theoretical perspectives and methods employed, illustrates the contributions of and connections among the individual articles, synthesizes the overall conclusions drawn from the empirical studies, and identifies avenues for future research.

Synopsis

1. Introduction

Populism is one of the most debated issues in contemporary politics. Populist actors around the globe are increasingly successful, effective in election campaigns, and receive significant media attention. Populist actors arise across the entire political spectrum and in various cultural and political contexts and are labeled as a "truly *global* phenomenon" (de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018, p. 3). Left-wing populist actors and parties such as Chávez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, Podemos in Spain, or Syriza in Greece, are famous examples of the political left-wing spectrum. The list of successful right-wing populist actors is even more comprehensive: Donald Trump in the US, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Marine Le Pen in France, or Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines – just to name some exemplary and well known cases. This insufficient enumeration illustrates that in the twenty first century, a populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004) has become omnipresent and is adjudged to a variety of political actors. Moreover, the concept of populism is generously used by journalists, public intellectuals and observers of everyday politics, and this development is also mirrored in academic research (Kriesi, 2018). Populism challenges the institutions and core norms of liberal democracies and, for example, has proven to provoke a dangerous amount of nationalism, a disregard for political correctness or an indifference to human rights. Therefore, it is not surprising that populism is one of the most thriving areas of academic research which has grown exponentially (Pappas, 2016). If the term *populism* or *populist* is for example searched in Google Scholar approximately 400 000 hits are issued.[1]

As populism is an emerging research field in social science, many facets of the phenomenon have been at the center of scholarly attention. Pappas (2016) identifies four distinct waves of scholarship on populism. The earliest wave – *the pioneers* – originated at an international conference in 1967, which resulted in a book by Ionescu and Gellner (1969). This early cohort of scholars was unable to reach an unanimous verdict on the definition of populism, and in the 1980s many scholars still argued that populism 'covers an unusually wide range of diverse phenomena' (Canovan, 1982, p. 544). However, the pioneers' wave sensitized scholars to the importance of populism and established international and comparative research interest. The second wave – *classical populism* – was established in the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars focused on the explanation of authoritarian populist movements in Latin

[1] More than 16 million hits are listed in the main Google search engine as of August 2018.

America, which resulted in a lack of comparability potential and the country specific findings could not be translated to liberal democracies. However this wave branded into two important features: the mass movement character and the importance of charismatic leadership. The third wave dealt exclusively with *neoliberal populism* by researching several cases in Latin America. Since the 1990s, the study of populism has also grown exponentially in Western democracies and *the contemporary wave* is largely based on the idea of a populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004). While the definition remains a heated controversy, research began to assess the degrees of populism, by content analyzing the utilization of populist communication in party manifestos, press releases, or media coverage by predefined populist actors or political actors across the entire political spectrum and around the globe (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Another area of growing interest is a survey data based approach to measure populist attitudes on a macro level (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2013; Schulz et al., 2017) or experimental studies focusing on effects of populism on an individual micro level (e.g., Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Wirz, 2018).

However, why should we care about populism, besides the wave of success of political actors and the emergence and hype in academic research? What can the study of populism actually teach us, and can it solve the questions of what impact it has on democracies? Is populism more of a challenge and a corrective or a threat to democratic systems? One reason for the growing interest is due to the common opinion that populism embodies a dangerous trend that pursues problematic goals such as the exclusion of ethnic minorities or that it is inherently hostile to the idea and the institutions of liberal democracies (Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde, 2004). In its extreme forms, populism rejects all limitations on the expression of popular will and the independence of key institutions (Mudde, 2004). Arguing from this perspective, populism is perceived as a pathology or serious threat for modern democracies. On the other hand, populism, more than anything, challenges the status quo by introducing new issues to the political agenda or challenging the political discourse of mainstream parties. Therefore it can be argued that this is not necessarily a dangerous manifestation and can even promote and stabilize a democracy by giving a voice to groups that are not represented by the elites (Kriesi, 2018). This potentially good effect can be perceived as functional for the health of a democracy (Akkerman, 2003; Canovan, 1999). Overall, the impact populism has on democracies 'has tended to be less an empirical question and more a theoretical issue, which

is answered mostly by speculations deriving from an ideal standpoint of how democracy should be' (Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 185). Therefore, I agree with Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2012) standpoint that populism is both a threat and a corrective for democratic politics depending on the political context and system of individual democracies. In democracies with consensual, parliamentary systems, strong institutions of checks and balances, and a strong and autonomous press system, populism may be less likely to become an existential threat. In countries with a polarized majority voting system, weak institutions of checks and balances, and a weak press, the perspective may be more negative (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Regardless of whether populism is perceived as normatively good or bad, a real consequence of populism for democracies is the fact that populist actors achieve success in elections and become official forces in government. Hence, ignoring them completely is no longer a viable solution.

The major questions that engages me as a communication scholar is not to answer whether populism is a pathology or a corrective measure, but rather what influences the media has on the phenomenon. I emphasize the crucial role of the communicative aspects of populism research and I am completely supportive of Moffitt's (2016, p. 94) argument that "media can no longer be treated as a 'side issue' when it comes to understanding contemporary populism. It must be put at the center of our analysis". Crucial questions concerning whether media outlets are seen as paladins or accomplices for populist actors and issues (Mazzoleni, 2014) or if media actors themselves become populist actors and communicate in a populist fashion are relevant. Essentially, which role certain media outlets play in fostering populist communication and what explanatory variables of channels, actors, and issues that increase the usage of populist communication can be identified. By answering some of these inquiries, this dissertation aims to contribute to the fourth and contemporary wave of populism research by focusing on political actors' communication and utilization of populist communication elements across media channels in the area of hybrid and digital media systems.

Although the systematic empirical research of populist communication has only started in the 1990s and is a rather young field comparatively, populist communication has been analyzed in various communication channels, and research has investigated how different political actors communicate in a populist manner. We have gained knowledge about how populism is utilized in party and election manifestos (Rooduijn, de Lange, & van der Brug,

2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011), political speeches (Hawkins, 2009; Wodak, 2015), political party broadcasts (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), the news media (e.g., Akkerman, 2011; Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011; Herkman, 2017; Rooduijn, 2014), online media (Blassnig, Ernst, Büchel, Engesser, & Esser, 2018), and political talk shows (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011). From the actor perspective, various studies have investigated whether members of populist parties actually communicate in a more populist manner, and both individual country case studies (e.g., Bernhard, 2017; Bobba & McDonnell, 2016; March, 2017; Stockemer & Barisione, 2017) and some multi-country comparisons (e.g., Caiani & Della Porta, 2011; van Kessel, 2015) have found supporting evidence for this. Additionally, a few single country (e.g., Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and comparative international studies (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Schmidt, 2017) uniformly measured the proportion of populist communication among a wide variety of political actors. However, these studies were missing the integration of new media channels that have changed political communication patterns and routines – both from the perspective of media and political actors – immensely. Digital and social media are particularly relevant for populism, as they provide several opportunity structures that fosters populist communication and enables populist actors to employ new communication strategies (e.g., Krämer, 2017). Although scholars have intensively investigated the relationship between political populism and the mass media, as well as political actors on social media, the combination of populist communication and social media has rarely been investigated and has been neglected for a long time. At the initial starting point of my dissertation project, the extant research on populism in social media was rare and consisted of a handful of case studies of single countries of predefined populist actors (Bartlett, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2015; Groshek & Engelbert, 2013; van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). Recently, scholars have begun to include how social media is utilized by political actors more systematically and have theoretically discussed the relation and affinity of social media to populism (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018; Krämer, 2017; Postill, 2018). However, these newer studies still either investigate populist communication in single country cases, like Italy or Germany (Bobba, 2018; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Stier, Posch, Bleier, & Strohmaier, 2017), or focus on Twitter communication by populist presidents in Latin America (Waisbord & Amado, 2017) and predefined populist leaders (Gonawela et al., 2018).[2] An

[2] Other studies focused on what effects populist communication on social media has on citizens or populist attitudes (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Heiss & Matthes, 2017; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Kalsnes, Larsson, % Enli, 2017; Bobba, Cremonesi, Mancosu, & Seddone, 2018).

exception is the study by Zulianello, Albertini, and Ceccobelli (2018) that investigated the Facebook communications of 38 political leaders in 26 countries in regard to the utilization of populist messages.

Despite this fundamental increase of populism research and foundational evidence of its utilization, two major aspects remain unanswered. First, the definition of populism and populist communication is still not without its challenges nor has it reached a worldwide consensus. I will propose a conceptualization and operationalization that combines and integrates the two major traditions to comprehend populist communication – ideology and style. I further argue that populist communication is not a binary concept but rather a matter of degree, possibly employed by every political actor to some extent. This allows for an empirical conclusion whether certain actors' communication is more (or less) populist compared to others. Second, there is still no agreement on *who* expresses and *to what extent* political actors can spread populism, and we know little about how populist communication is utilized across different media channels in the digital age or which niche aspects result in a higher affinity with populist communication.[3] In particular, the potential of new digital media channels and the affinity and opportunity structures of populism to social media has been neglected in the research field. This dissertation will present crucial aspects of channel, party, and issue characteristics that are helpful to understand the rise of populism in contemporary Western democracies and allow for an identification of explanatory factors of the populist *Zeitgeist*. This important, yet largely unexplored field of populist communication led to four questions that form the basis of this cumulative dissertation (see Figure 1 for an overview):

1. How can we define populist communication, and how is it utilized by a broad spectrum of political actors in different countries across various media channels? (RQ1)

2. Which types of communication channels (Facebook, Twitter, talk shows and news media) have high affinity for populist communication? (RQ2)

3. Which types of party properties (extremist, opposition, challenger, and populist) and politicians (backbencher) foster the utilization of populist communication messages and styles? (RQ3)

[3] Next to political actors, media actors or citizens can also act and be perceived as populist actors. However, this dissertation excludes the role of these actors and dominantly focuses on political actors' self-presentation in the media.

4. Which types of political issues (populist issues) are affine to populist communication elements? (RQ4)

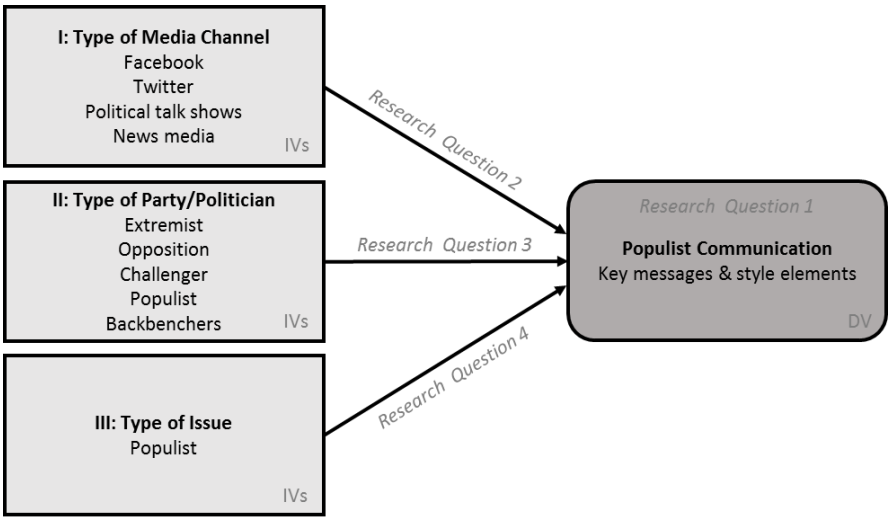

Figure 1: Overview of Research Questions

These four main research questions built the foundation of this cumulative dissertation project and are assessed in five journal articles and the synopsis at hand. This synopsis continues by (2) presenting the theoretical framework, (3) providing an overview of the methodological design and discussing the development of the main dependent variable, (4) summarizing the five individual publications, and (5) discussing and reviewing the main results and their implications, critically observing the overall findings and limitations and providing an outlook on future research possibilities.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this synopsis combines three crucial concepts that build the foundation of the four overarching research questions. First, I will discuss how political actors in general communicate in the digital media system and how the emergence of new online media channels reshaped the relation between political and media actors. Second, an integrative definition of populist communication is discussed by introducing a four-folded comprehension of populist communication that differentiate between populist actors and populism as a strategy, ideology and mode of presentation. The third theoretical component discusses the crucial role of different political and discursive opportunity structures that effect the emergence of populist communication. I then identify three main areas that that have a high affinity to populist communication and discuss the influence and the individual opportunity structures for populist communication by comparing various media types, actor types and issue types.

2.1 Political actors' communication strategies in the digital age

The relationship between media and politics – or as Gans (1979) labeled it the tango between journalist and politicians – has been a key issue for several decades because of the mass media's significant role in modern democracies. The main question driving the project at hand in this regard is how political actors use the media to achieve their political goals and which communication strategies (e.g., populist communication) they apply and which actions they take. The plan of action, aims and motives behind a political strategy that are chosen to use and interact with the media may vary. One helpful model for discussing this relationship is the *Information and Arena Model* by van Aelst and Walgrave (2016), which argues that the news media fulfill a dual function for political actors.[4] The starting point is the political actor perspective and the suggestion that the "media's impact mainly works via political actors that are (un)able to employ the media to further their goals" (van Aelst & Walgrave, 2017, p. 4). Also within the tradition of mediatization research, this shift from *media-centric* to *actor-centric* in the age of the Internet is increasingly supported and describes the development in which political actors are no longer forced (but instead choose to adapt) to certain media logics if they fit their political purposes (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Marcinkowski & Steiner,

[4] Other model discussing the role of the mass media in the perspective of political actors is the *PMP-Model* by Wolfsfeld (2011), the *Cycles of Spin* by Sellers (2011), or Entman's (2003) C*ascading Activation Model* see van Aelst and Walgrave (2017).

2014). By implementing a functional approach, the *Information and Arena Model* argues that politicians are rational and strategic actors,[5] and the model focuses on why politicians use the media and the motives behind their actions. The media thereby fulfill a dual role. The *information function of the media* describes the pattern by which the media provides political actors with necessary information. Politicians either passively consume the information provided by the media or actively use the consumed information in their work. Much more importantly for this study is the second function of the media: *the arena function*. Two sub-functions are distinguished that explain that political actors must either obtain personal access to the media or convey their own messages in the media arena. The traditional media arena is ruled by particular media routines and standards of newsworthiness and news values. For political actors fighting for attention within this arena, the competitors are not journalists but other political actors.[6] The overall goal in the media arena is to maximize positive publicity with news management efforts (Strömbäck & Esser, 2017). Because news media attention is generally skewed among political actors, politicians in power or political actors who are charismatic, communicative and attractive may have advantages in entering the media arena (van Aelst & Walgrave, 2017).

The manner in which political actors strategically reach their goals in the media arena can be described as *strategic news management*. The typology introduced by Strömbäck and Esser (2017) describes the relationship between strategic goals and operative tactics and proposes two dimensions. The first dimension describes the types of strategic news management and distinguishes between the promotion of policies and personnel on the one hand and deflecting criticism and attacking opponents on the other hand. The second dimension differentiates between two objects of news management: policy (issues are the messages) and character (persons are the messages). The combination of these two-sided dimensions results in four arguments that allocate tactics to styles of strategic news management. First, political actors attempt to set the media agenda, prime the public, and frame their own political messages. Most effectively, political actors promote their policies and issues in all available communication channels through the use of channels such as websites, social media or advertising that they control or by obtaining news coverage that is more under the control

[5] Strategic actor means that politicians have goals, use available means and choose their plans of action in attempts to realize these goals (Strömbäck & Esser, 2017).

[6] In addition to the media arena, political actors strategically act and compete in three other arenas: the electoral, internal and parliamentary arenas (Strömbäck & Esser, 2017; Sjöblom, 1969). Because the media arena is the crucial arena for the research questions at hand, the other arenas are disregarded here.

of media actors. Second, image management intends to strategically improve the positive and professional image of a politician and is often combined with event management by staging pseudo-events that result in good publicity. Third, agenda cutting and message control describe tactics that shift the attention from potentially hurtful issues by not commenting, playing down their newsworthiness or creating a new, more lucrative, issue. Finally, the tactic of attacking politicians by applying negative campaign tactics that attack the opponents' personality, record or opinion are a fourth tactic utilized by strategic political actors.

These four components of an effective and strategic news managements describe the general aims and motives (political strategy) that political actors apply when they address the media to fulfill their goals. Because the goals of political actors (e.g., vote maximizing, office seeking and policy seeking) remain mostly stable over time, the tactics and strategies applied have somewhat changed with the emergence of new and digital media (Epstein, 2018). Building on Denton's (1998) typology of strategic elements, Stromer-Galley (2014) argues that in addition to the original components (strategic environment, organization, finance, public opinion polling, media, and the candidates image), the involvement of citizens is a crucial addition to campaign strategies in the digital age. She argues that the old paradigm of information dissemination and persuasion exclusively via the mass media has changed to a new paradigm of controlled interactivity via digital media (Stromer-Galley, 2014). Although political actors have always communicated with citizens in various ways depending on the technological possibilities (Römmele, 2003), digital media and especially social network sites provide politicians with a unique opportunity to engage in direct and interactive communication with voters. Interactivity is a new tactic that political actors can employ that was not explicitly mentioned in the original typologies by Denton (1998) and Strömbäck and Esser (2017). Additional functions and tactics offered by new and social media that are implemented in political actors' communication strategies can be identified as the following: (1) the mobilization of the base to achieve wider attention (e.g., Kreiss, 2014; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012), (2) the possibility of circumventing gatekeepers and directly addressing the public (e.g., Parmelee & Bichard, 2012), (3) the higher potential for personalized image building and messaging (e.g., Gainous & Wagner, 2014; Meeks, 2016), (4) a new and cheap media channel to influence the agendas and frames of journalists by, for example, using hashtags (e.g., Enli & Simonsen, 2017; Kreiss, 2014), (5) the possibility to test and scale new campaign and communication strategies effectively and in a timely matter to use them as a

proxy for public opinion (e.g., Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Karpf, 2017), and (6) as argued above, a more intense and direct involvement of citizens via interactivity (e.g., Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet, & Benoit, 2016; Stromer-Galley, 2014). The list of these six digital- and social media-specific communication strategies must be viewed in addition to strategic news management tactics and are especially present in the hybrid media system often in combination with political actors. Depending on their strategic goals, political actors' access to the media, the popularity and attention they receive or their financial resources, political actors combine and use various combination of all possible elements in their overall communication strategy.

One specific and (for this synopsis) crucial political communication strategy is populism. As populism has become mainstream in politics (Mudde, 2004), various political actors utilize it to achieve a goal such as winning an election. The possibilities offered by new media (e.g., circumvention, personalization or citizen involvement) have an especially high affinity with populism. In the following, I will emphasize which populist-specific tactics political actors can use, how they are translated to communication efforts and how they differ between communication channel, party characteristics and issue types.

2.2 Integrative definition of populist communication

The omnipresent buzzword *populism* is a highly contested concept, it is difficult to define, and is has multifaceted vernacular implementations (Bale, van Kessel, & Taggart, 2011); moreover, both its societal impacts and its interest to scholars are continuously expanding. The definitional ambiguity of populism resonates mostly with the various manifestations of populism and its dependence on contextual factors (Priester, 2007). Following Kriesi (2018) and Engesser et al. (2017) I propose a four-folded comprehension of the populist communication logic that actors can use to communicate to the public or their voters. By focusing on the contemporary political and media realities of Europe and North America, I comprehend populism as a relational concept (Rooduijn, 2014) with a "distinct set of political ideas" (Hawkins, 2010, p. 5), and therefore conceive and define first and foremost it as a thin ideology (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004). Next to the ideological understanding, populism can further emphasis the populist actor or messenger of populist communication itself, by asking *who* the messenger of populist communication is. The focus here lies on predefined and classified populist actors and draws conclusions about populist strategies, messages and styles based on these actors communication repertoires (Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017). This actor-centered approaches hence defines actors and their

characteristics (not their communication) as populist. Next to this actor-centered approach populist communication can be perceived as a communication-centered phenomenon or an approach (Sorensen, 2017; Stanyer et al., 2017) that takes its starting point in key characteristics of populist communication and analyzes the extent to which different actors use these elements. Thus, it is unnecessary to predefine or classify political actors as populist or non-populist. I argue that communication-centered approach are more expedient, as populist communication is not a binary label but rather a matter of degree that can be potentially utilized by all sorts of political actors. Following this, populist communication can be understood as a political strategy (2), an ideology (3), or a communication style/discourse (4). Populism as a political strategy refers to populism as a mean to an end and focuses on the aims and motives and questions *why* political actors employ populist communication elements in their repertoires (Engesser et al., 2017). Populism as an ideology thirdly focuses on the core of populism by focusing on the content of populist communication (*what* is being said) and the populist communication style finally conceives of populism as a mode of presentation and is interested in the form of the communication (*how* something is being said). Figure 2 provides an overview of this four-folded comprehension of the populist communication logic.

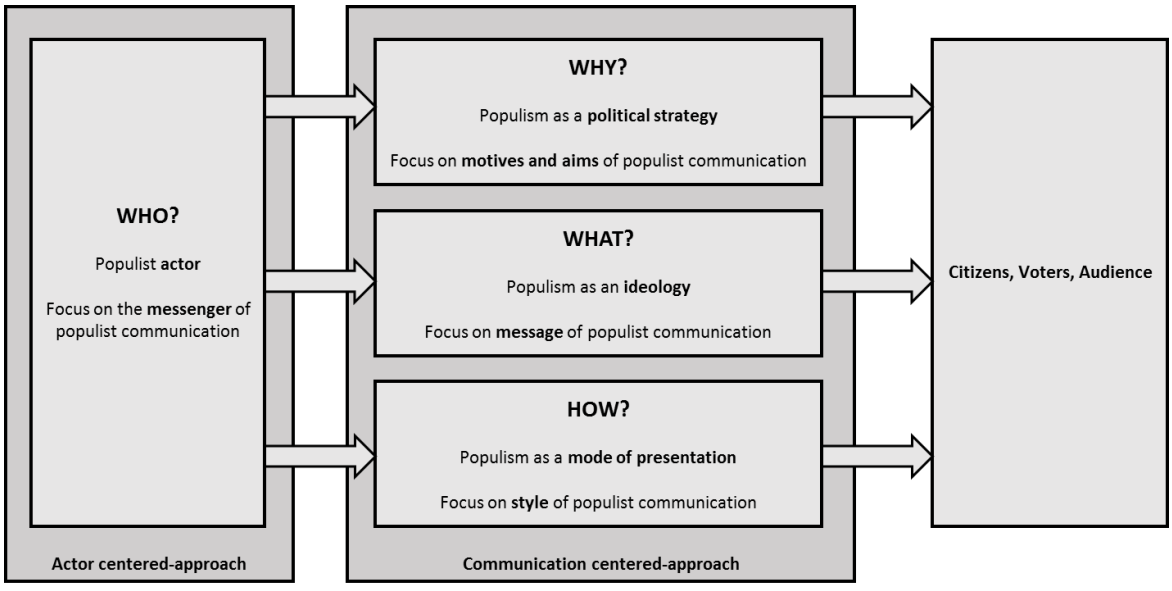

Figure 2: Overview of populist communication logic

These four alternative ways of conceptualizing populist communication are not mutually exclusive and merely represent different aspects of populism (Engesser et al., 2017). The

populist ideology forms the basis and is the most essential and necessary component of populist communication. The ideological core component of populism are expressed with several key messages that form the foundation of the populist communication repertoire. The core ideology of populism and the political strategy and/or mode of presentation often go together (Kriesi, 2018). Hence, a populist strategy and communication style are best viewed as complementary to the core ideological notion of populism (Kriesi, 2018).

The four key components of the populist communication logic are briefly introduced in the following four chapters. As this dissertation focuses on a communication-centered approach and analysis the communicative output of several political actors, the emphasis lies on populism as an ideology and as a mode of presentation. I therefore follow Hawkins (2009) and Wodak (2015) who argue that populist communication always combines and integrates ideological messages and communication styles.

2.2.1 Populist actors

A crucial actor within populism research is the political actor himself, who has the populist political ideology present in his mindset as a mental construct.[7] The populist actors addresses the citizens or his voters directly with is communicative statements (e.g., via press releases, public speeches or social media communication) or indirectly via mass media (e.g., print or TV news media). The literature describes populist actors as movements (e.g., Kriesi, 2013), right or left-wing parties (e.g., Mudde 2004), and often as a single politicians or the charismatic leader. Although the charismatic leader or spokesperson of a populist movement is not inherent or necessary for populism, it is a feature that often occurs. Charismatic leaders are eloquent spokespersons, act as the vox populi, are often political outsiders and have direct and unmediated access to the people's grievances (Kriesi, 2018). Populist actors or charismatic leaders embody the core idea of populism and address their voters with direct and indirect populist communication messages and styles.

2.2.2 Populism as a political strategy

Mostly populist actors but also other political actors use populism particularly as a means to its end to achieve their goals. In general, political strategies focus on the methods and instruments of achieving a political goal, like winning and exercising power (Weyland, 2001). As discussed above (2.1), political actors can use different strategies to fulfill goals like vote

[7] This mindset can also be found in supporters and voters who share populist attitudes Schulz et al. (2017).

maximizing, office seeking and policy seeking and may use news management or special digital communication strategies within the media arena to achieve their plan of action. Populism as a political strategy is defined as a specific way of competing for political power, by mostly an individual and charismatic leader who "seeks or exercises government power based on support from large numbers of followers" (Ware, 2002; Weyland, 2001, p. 12). The instruments of choice to mobilize the masses and demonstrate their distinctive power capabilities are plebiscites, mass demonstrations, or opinion polls (Weyland, 2001). Contemporary (populist) leaders reach the masses especially through mass media and especially via digital and social media, leaders are able to maintain a close and direct impression to the people (Weyland, 2017). Populism as political strategy is most effective in crisis situations (e.g., Taggart, 2000) and the best way to "engineer mass support is to confront threats to popular well-being and take on the enemies of the people" (Weyland, 2017, p. 12).

2.2.3 Populism as an ideology

As a thin ideology, populism is defined as a relation concepts with a distinct set of political ideas and consists of three core concepts: the people, the elite, and popular sovereignty (e.g., Mény & Surel, 2002; Wirth et al., 2016). This minimal definition approach offers the clear advantage that the thin ideology can be combined with different host ideologies and is inclusive of all manifestations of populism (from left to right). Depending on the supplemented ideologies, the notions of the people and the elite can vary. While right-wing populism tends to define the people as a nation and is more likely to attack elites such as the current government or mass media, left-wing populism conceives the people as a class and may denounce economic and religious elites (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Kriesi, 2014).

Sovereignty plays a pivotal role and is the core principle of populism. Particularly in opposition to representative forms of democracy, the rule of the people is the central motive of the populist argument. This demand for unrestricted power for the people distinguishes the populist idea of democracy from the constitutional and liberal logics of democracy (Abts & Rummens, 2007). The *people* operate as the locus of power by having the indisputable right to constitute power; consequently, all politics should be based on the unhesitating expression of the volonté générale (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004). The people are characterized as a homogenous and monolithic group, are equipped with virtues, are commonly good and paramount and act according to common sense (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Taggart, 2000). The conception of the people can vary and differentiates

between people as demos, ethnos, and class (Canovan, 1999; Kriesi, 2013). Following the populist logic, the *elites* are accused of having deprived the people of their right to sovereignty and find themselves opposed to the people. This antagonism is essential to the understanding of populism and is often described as Manichean (Mudde, 2004). Elites are a non-homogeneous group, and different types of elites (political, economic, cultural, intellectual or legal) can be addressed. Independent of their typology, elites are conceived of as corrupt, immoral, evil or incompetent and are described as the eternal nemesis of the people (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mény & Surel, 2002; Mudde, 2004). In addition to elites, dangerous others are excluded from the people and are perceived as a threat from within the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The ostracizing of others such as immigrants, criminals, profiteers, perverts, and other minorities, however, is not an intrinsic property of populism but instead is linked to forms of radical right-wing populism (Rooduijn,2014).

When communicated to the public, the three ideological dimensions (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring sovereignty are broken down into nine key messages (see Table 1). These nine key messages emphasis the content of the populist message and focus on what is being communication by political actors.

2.2.4 Populism as a mode of presentation

Within a communication-centered approach, populism can additionally be defined as a mode of presentation or a discourse that emphasizes various communication styles with a high affinity to populism and focuses on how political actors communicate. In my comprehension, different to some scholars (e.g., Moffitt, 2016), populist communication styles contain no ideological elements (like approaching the people) and focus only on the way political ideas are communicated by a political actor (Block & Negrine, 2017). A thorough literature research for style elements attributed to populist actors or populist communication resulted in the identification of seven style elements that form three major dimensions: negativity, emotionality and sociability. Negativity comprises negativism and crisis rhetoric; emotionality includes emotional tone, absolutism, and patriotism; and sociability is composed of colloquialism and intimization (see Table 2). Although these styles are not exclusively populist by itself, they have a high affinity with populism and populist actors and can be considered expressions of the same communication strategy that can also lead to the use of populist key messages (Krämer, 2017; Kriesi, 2018). Empirically, Wettstein et al. (2018b) showed, that there is in fact a strong linkage between the populist ideological content and

populist communication styles in the news media and that populist content is the strongest predictor for the prevalence of style elements. These results support my comprehension to not integrate ideological components of populism into style element as for example Moffitt (2016), Jagers and Walgrave (2007) or Block and Negrine (2017) suggested. I follow Wettstein et al. (2018b) in their argumentation, that ideological key messages and stylistic elements must be separated both analytically and empirically.

Overall, my proposed populist communication logic combines four crucial aspects by focusing on *who* is communicating, *why* the strategy is selected, about *what* the actors speaks and *how* he articulates himself. As the main focus of this dissertation lies on the analysis of political actor's communicative output across several media channels by means of a content analysis approach, I emphasis both ideological content and style elements of populism. With that approach, the investigation is firstly not restricted to predefined populist actors and allows for the integration of several, diverse political actors. Secondly, the aim is not to questions the aims and motives of selected political actors that employ a populist communication strategy, but rather empirically investigate and identify aspects that are beneficial for populist communication to flourish. Whether populism is a successful political strategy and consciously put into practice by politicians or campaign managers is unequivocal an interesting and important research questions, however it is not the focus of this dissertation project. Finally the combined analysis of both ideological messages and style elements contributes to the field of populist communication and allows for and empirical and holistic analysis across several social and political contexts.

2.3 Opportunity structures for populist communication

Populist communication is not detached or isolated and rather embedded in specific social and political contexts that effect the populist potential and can be best captured with the concept of opportunity structures (Engesser et al., 2017). The concept of political opportunity structures dates back to the seminal work by Eisinger (1973), Tilly (1978), and Kitschelt (1986) and was originally developed in the context of research on social movements. Similar to populism, there are many definitions of the concept and scholars within the field have not reached a consensus (e.g., Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Giugni, 2011). Classical political opportunity structures represent a general setting that affects all movements and actors in a similar fashion (Berclaz & Giugni, 2016) and the majority of scholars agree that "fixed or permanent institutional features combined with more short-term, volatile or conjectural

factors to produce an overall particular opportunity structure" (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006, p. 422). I follow Kitschelt (1986, p. 58) who defines political opportunities as "specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others". In this sense, political opportunities are issue and context specific and are more favorable for certain challenges or groups (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1992). Traditionally the focus lies on institutional opportunities like the degree of access to the institutionalized political system or responsiveness of political authorities (Giugni, 2011). Next to institutional elements, scholars started to include the cultural dimensions to the comprehension of opportunity structures (e.g., Gamson & Meyer, 1996). A way to capture these cultural dimensions is the introduction of *discursive opportunity structures* (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, & Passy, 2005). In this perspective, opportunities have two sides: The institutional side refers to the access actors have to the political system or the configuration of power within the system, while the discursive side relates to the public visibility, resonance and political legitimacy of certain actors (Giugni, 2011; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). Discursive opportunity structures are defined as "the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere" (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004, p. 202) and highlight the role of the mass media and gatekeepers as pivotal. The theory assumes that political actors will choose the most favorable options for action and communication to achieve their goals, which include visibility, resonance and legitimacy (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; Koopmans & Muis, 2009). Visibility is a necessary condition for a message to influence the public discourse and depends on the inclusion within different media channels and the prominence of the inclusion. Secondly, the amount and character of public responses is an important discursive opportunity. As messages are more relevant for journalist that either positively (consonance) or negatively (dissonance) resonate, resonance helps the actors and their opinions to be more prominent in the media arena. Finally the third discursive opportunity structure is public legitimacy, defined as the degree to which reactions by third actors in the public sphere support an actor's claims more than they reject them. Following this understanding, the probability for political actors to enter the media arena is dependent on several institutional and discursive opportunities.

Opportunity structure are essential for populist actors or populist communication – like for any other political actors or social movements – to successfully enter the media arena. Next to institutional political opportunities which are more constant and dependent on the political and media system of each country, I highlight the importance of the three discursive factors (visibility, resonance and legitimacy) for analyzing populist communication in the media from a communication-centered perspective. As I emphasis the perspective of political actors and their communicative output, I discuss three aspects that promote or hinder the potential of populist communication. First, I focus on the advantages and disadvantages of various media channels for their circulation of populist communication. Second, I define different groups of political actors (on party and politician level) that are expected to use populist communication with a higher probability. Finally, I discuss the effect of the thematic context and identify political issues that are more suitable for the dissemination of populist communication.

2.4 Populist communication across channel types

Research in political communication is often focused on single platforms (Bode & Vraga, 2017). The reasons for this are fourfold (Bode & Vraga, 2017): (i) Platforms are differently unitized, making comparison across them more difficult; (ii) differences in the availability and use of privacy settings promote the study of easy- access channels, such as Twitter or the news media; (iii) corporations that operate media platforms are unwilling to share information about their audiences; and (iv) the combination of these factors render multi-platform research increasingly expensive. As a result, multiple media studies analyzing content are scarce within political communication research. Notable exceptions are single country studies focusing on a specific media and political system (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Kang, Fowler, Franz, & Ridout, 2017; Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018; Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010). The growth of digital media and the emergence of the hybrid media system make it increasingly difficult to understand the role of a single medium in isolation (Bode & Vraga, 2017; Chadwick, 2017). This trend is especially precarious in social media research, as two-thirds of all research focuses on single platforms and analyzes either Facebook or Twitter (Blank & Lutz, 2017; Bode & Vraga, 2017).

I note that especially within populist communication research, multi-channel studies are inevitable. Studies have shown that the degree of populist communication is context-dependent and influenced by specific characteristics of the media channel. Bos and Brants

(2014) compare newspapers, television news, talk shows and party political broadcasts (PPB) in the Netherlands and conclude that PPB and talk shows are especially favorable for populist communication. Comparing speeches in Swiss parliamentary committees, open parliamentary floors, and talk shows, Cranmer (2011) concludes that public talk shows are beneficial for populist communication. These two single-country studies are not only missing validation based on an international country comparison but they also further neglect the influence of digital and social media channels. In the "fourth age of political communication" (Blumler, 2013) however, the importance and influence of social media are essential and should be incorporated into populist communication research.

Different media present different opportunity structures for political actors and influence the choices that channel political actors prefer in different situations. Sometimes political actors heavily rely on mediated communication by traditional news media outlets, and other topics are better placed in arenas in which the influences of media actors are limited. In general, political actors are motivated to exercise as much control as possible over how their messages are conveyed to the public. To this end, Paletz (2002) introduced a three-way classification according to which political messages can be subject to heavy, medium or no journalistic intervention. Media interventionism, in general, refers to a media-centered political reporting style and can be interpreted as a professionally motivated behavior by media actors to increase their control over the news content (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). Examples of channels without intervention include social media channels such as Twitter or Facebook, which allow politicians to send messages to voters directly, without journalistic filters. An example of medium intervention is political TV talk shows, in which communication control is shared between political and media actors. An example of heavy intervention is a newspaper report in which control over the final product rests exclusively with the journalist. Adapting the theory of media interventionism (Paletz, 2002; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009) to populist communication in the media, I argue that the lower the degree of journalistic interference in a channel, the greater the potential for unfiltered, unrestricted populism.

This cumulative dissertation contributes to the literature by providing one of the first qualitative and systematic findings related to populist communication on social media (*ARTICLE I*), comparing the occurrences of populism across Facebook and Twitter (*ARTICLE II & III*) and offering an additional comparison with politicians' statements on political talk shows (*ARTICLE*

IV) and news media (*ARTICLE V*). The individual opportunity structures of each communication channel in relation to populist communication are discussed in the following three chapters.

2.4.1 Social Media platforms

Social media has high significance in contemporary politics. Twitter and Facebook have emerged as central media platforms and rival traditional news media in their reach and influence (Fisher, Marshall, & McCallum, 2018). Whereas legacy media is based on traditional 'mass media logic' with professional gatekeepers and a relatively passive audience, 'network media logic' evolves from interest-bound and like-minded peer networks (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The possibility to bypass the news media and the ability of political actors to communicate directly with the public is considered a potential self-representation mechanism of political actors (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2013). Messages are neither mediated, edited, interpreted nor filtered by professional media actors. Social media are built upon the logic of virality, which compels political actors to communicate primarily those messages that users like, comment, and share within their networks (Klinger, 2013). Crucial opportunity structures make social media a propitious space for populist communication, and the relation between populism and social media have been described as a 'elective affinity' by Gerbaudo (2018), who identifies social media as an ideal platform for populism. Many populist actors especially consider journalists and "established" mass media to be controlled by the ruling elite. In their view, mainstream political reporting misses the views and interests of the people, is corrupt and systematically denigrates those politicians who would stand up for the true will of the people (Fisher et al., 2018; Moffitt, 2016). Tweets by Donald Trump such as "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views. [January 22, 2017]", "#FraudNewsCNN #FNN [July 2, 2017]" or "Mexico's court system is corrupt. I want nothing to do with Mexico other than to build an impenetrable WALL and stop them from ripping off U.S. [March 5, 2015]" illustrate the enormous potential of an unfiltered and direct populist communication and the fraud news allegation. Nevertheless, social media do not provide a monopoly for populist actors or populist communication. Political actors across the political landscape may profit from the advantages offered by social media either in their election campaigns or in their day-to-day communications (Postill, 2018).

The theoretical relation between populism and online communication was established in the late 1990s by Bimber (1998), who explored the Internet's potential to "restructure political

power in a populist direction and the possibility of an "unmediated communication between citizens and the government" (p. 137). Building upon these early theoretical assumptions, I argue that six opportunity structures of Facebook and Twitter foster the potential of populist communication and make them particularly well-suited channels of populist communication (also see *ARTICLE II&V*). First, they provide direct access to the public without external or journalistic interference. This allows politicians to spread their messages directly and unmediated. Second, social media offer the possibility of establishing a close and direct connection to the people, which is a crucial element for populism to flourish. Social media make politicians more approachable due to lower barriers of interactions and the possible creation of stronger ties. Third, social media foster the potential for personalization through targeted and personalized forms of communication. Politicians can shape their own messages, focus on their professional activities and either share insights from their personal lives or reveal their emotions and feelings. Fourth, social media can be used to create protected spaces in which one-sided, anecdotal evidence of populist convictions can be accumulated in large quantities and made accessible to followers. The repeated selective exposure to this one-sided information promotes an in-group mentality that populists can use to mobilize their supporters and coordinate political actions. Fifth, social media offer the opportunity to connect with specific groups and can create a feeling of community, belonging and recognition among otherwise scattered groups. Within these protected spaces, an aggressive and uncivil tone can be cultivated. Finally, Facebook and Twitter allow populist actors to criticize the mainstream media as distorted and unfair and offer an alternative medium to those citizens they have been able to alienate from the traditional media. Taken together, these six opportunity structures render social media an especially convenient instrument for populist communication.

When comparing the two most commonly used social media platforms, I argue that Facebook provides a more attractive environment for populist communication than Twitter (see *ARTICLE III*). First, Facebook offers more reciprocal messages exchanges, which brings users closer together, enhances the quality of interpersonal communication and fosters social capital. Second, Facebook has higher levels of proximity, and the connection between Facebook users is generally more intensive, personal and intimate. Third, due to the different characteristics of users (e.g., age, education, socioeconomic status, and political interest), Twitter has a stronger professional orientation and political actors may consider it less suitable

for spreading blunt and emotional appeals. In contrast, Facebook is the platform for ordinary citizens to interact with politicians (Kalsnes, Larsson, & Enli, 2017). Schulz (2018) recently confirmed this argument from the audience's perspective by showing that populist citizens are more likely to use Facebook as their source of political information, while non-populist citizens use Twitter for information purposes. Finally, Facebook has an advantage in that messages are not limited to a certain number of characters, which gives political actors the opportunity to make their case more effectively and elaborately. Jacobs and Spierings (2018) added to the technical argument that Twitter is less suitable for populist communication given their highly centralized party structure.

2.4.2 Political talk shows

Political talk shows are important outlets for the articulation of political affairs in a relatively sympathetic public setting (Baym, 2013; Jones, 2010; Kessler & Lachenmaier, 2017), have a positive effect on viewers' trust in politicians (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016), and are highly popular with politicians, as it affords them the opportunity to reach a large audience. They represent the media channel, in which communication control is shared between political and media actors (medium intervention) and not only offer the opportunity to bypass the watchdog journalism more commonly found in hard news programs but also allow for a more controlled self-presentation, and foster the potential for personalization (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016; Kessler & Lachenmaier, 2017).

As a channel with medium journalistic interventionism, talk shows provide another ideal stage for populist communication. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that this media genre offers populism the most favorable conditions compared to other public and non-public media genres (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011).

2.4.3 News media

Media appearances are both crucial and very attractive for politicians because the media provide a credible stage from which they can spread their messages to a wide audience. Political actors, however, must heavily rely on media actors to receive (favorable) coverage. The self-presentation of politicians and the possibility to cut out the intermediary of the news media is very restricted. Although the degree of journalistic interventionism is deepening on the media culture and the selection processes of journalists, politicians must employ clever news management strategies to pass through journalists' gates (Esser, 2008). In general, news

media are a platform with high interventionism, which hinders the self-presentation of populist actors and should result in marginalized occurrences of populist communication compared to channels with more autonomy. Even if populism itself has a high news value and populist actors and their norm-violating behavior may trigger journalists to open the gates, they are often confronted with harsh criticism (Haller, 2015; Mazzoleni, 2008). Official distancing in lead commentaries may explain why mainstream media outlets can become the target of populist attacks, with populists blaming the news media for conspiring with the establishment against the will of the people (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017).

2.5 Affinity of parties and politicians' characteristics with populism

A second condition that is expected to affect the dissemination of populist communication are specific characteristics of certain type of parties and politicians. Because populism is a thin ideology and employed by a multitude of political actors worldwide, this dissertation aims to determine which special properties of political actors increases the potential for populist communication. I have identified five relevant characteristics of political actors that have a high affinity with populism and should result in the greater utilization of both populist messages and populist styles. In regard to political actors' communication, this dissertation contributes to the field by showing that populism in Western democracies is not am exclusively right-wing phenomenon and that members of extreme (*ARTICLE II, III & IV*), opposition (*ARTICLE II*), challenger (*ARTICLE IV*), and populist parties (*ARTICLE V*), along with backbenchers (*ARTICLE V*) have a high affinity with populism.

2.5.1 Populist parties

First, political actors who are affiliated with a populist party are expected to utilize populist communication elements. Populist actors from left to right are extremely successful and have become important in many Western party systems. As support for populist actors increases, mainstream parties respond by increasingly using populist communication themselves, which leads to the belief that populism can be contagious (e.g., Bale, Green-Pedersen, Krouwel, Luther, & Sitter, 2010; Mény & Surel, 2002) and has become mainstream in politics (Mudde, 2004). By conceiving populism as a matter of degree, I argue that it could be plausible and sometimes lucrative for all political actors to employ certain populist communication elements. However, populist actors who have internalized the core concept of populism

(antagonism among the elite, the people and unrestricted sovereignty) are expected to employ much more populist communication elements than members of non-populist parties.

2.5.2 Extremist parties

Party extremism is another characteristic that has been identified as having a high affinity with populism (e.g., Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). As populism increases, especially in Western Europe, it is too often too quickly associated exclusively with the radical right, and it is crucial to reinforce the argument that populism can be combined with various ideologies and not restricted to right-wing parties. Although right- and left-leaning parties differ in their ideologies, party programs, and social basis, they have several characteristics in common that are related to populist communication. At least in Western Europe, extreme parties that have emerged in recent decades often compensate for their small party organizations with substantial communication offensives, tend to remain opposition parties, and share a protest attitude against established parties, politics, and state structures (Müller-Rommel, 1998). Extreme left- and right-wing parties are therefore more prone than moderate or mainstream parties to challenge the current establishment, attack the elite, and glorify the people in their political communication strategy.

2.5.3 Opposition parties

A third characteristic that has an impact on populist communication is the position of a party in the government. Mény and Surel (2002) argue that 'populist parties are by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government' and 'remain predominantly in opposition' (p. 18). In line with this argument, Heinisch (2003) notes that when right-wing populist parties enter the government, their unique strengths turn into disadvantages. Opposition parties profit from their position to blame and discredit the ruling elite and present themselves as the sole solution for the people. Even when governments either include or are supported by a populist party (Akkerman, Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016), discrediting and blaming the alleged elites remains a core feature of populist actors. This dual role of being in the government and simultaneously acting as the government's biggest critic is one strength of Christoph Blocher, the former leader of the Swiss Peoples Party. Blocher managed this double role by successfully promoting himself as challenger to the allegedly corrupt and incapable government, while simultaneously being part of that very same government.

2.5.4 Challenger parties

The so-called challenger parties are the fourth particularly relevant party category. They are often perceived as a threat to the party establishment (Meguid, 2005) and are assumed to use populist communication to generate attention (Kriesi, 2014). Throughout the various crisis cycles since the 1980s, new challenger parties from both the left and the right have emerged and achieved success in many Western democracies (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016; Müller-Rommel, 1998). Kriesi (2014) argues that these new challenger parties may be perceived as a threat to the establishment because they highlight problems that have been neglected by mainstream parties, mobilize outside of electoral channels, and resort to creative, innovative forms of protest communication. New right- and left-wing challenger parties can thus be expected to blame the elites and complain about neglect of the people's true concerns. Therefore, these parties may rely on populist communication to improve both their electoral chances (Betz, 2002) and their media visibility (Mazzoleni, 2008). These assumptions are supported by a longitudinal study from Switzerland that found that new parties – independent of their ideological stance – relied on high levels of populist communication in party advertising and press releases during their initial "challenger phase" (Weber, 2017).

The difference between challenger parties and opposition parties might not be clear at first sight. Although challenger parties are most often in opposition, they are relatively new to the party landscape and unlike the well-established opposition parties, have no tradition or history in their political system. Nevertheless, these two party characteristics often overlap.

2.5.5 Backbenchers

The final feature that has a high affinity with populism is at the level of individual politicians and highlights political actors that occupy a low position in the party hierarchy. The election of Donald Trump has again reminded us that actors from the political periphery can often achieve political success through the targeted use of populist communication (Stewart, 2018). There are also examples of this in Eastern and Western Europe on both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). Findings by Davis (2009) indicate that politicians who do not have the most elevated status (i.e., backbenchers) are especially likely to see the exploitation of "populist news values" (p. 209) as an important strategy to overcome the media threshold, particularly on social media, where they can communicate their messages directly to the public (see also Davis, 2010). van

Aelst and Walgrave (2016, p. 507) agree that "for backbenchers and newcomers, provocative statements are even more needed." It is noteworthy that such politicians' underdog status gives them a certain degree of authenticity: Backbenchers can use the anti-establishment dimension of populist communication particularly effectively by criticizing those in power both for their political failures and for their supposed neglect of the population's concerns, thereby reinforcing their own closeness to the people. In contrast, political frontbenchers and power-holder should sound much less convincing if they take a critical stand against the political establishment (Stewart, 2018). Political outsiders often employ a digital campaign strategy to spread their messages. On Facebook and Twitter, backbenchers are less disadvantaged and are independent from news cycles and journalists. Social media can even empower backbenchers and offer them the possibility to build their own power base of like-minded followers (Jacobs & Spierings, 2018). Backbenchers further establish a direct link to the people by being more interactive with citizens on Twitter than members of parliament who hold key positions (Spierings, Jacobs, & Linders, 2018).

2.6 Affinity of populism to political issues

The last condition favoring the spread of populist communication is the concentration on certain issues in the appeals of populist actors. Due to its ideological thinness and its chameleonic nature, populism can be enriched with thicker ideologies, is not restricted to certain parties and can be used by both left-wing and right-wing political actors (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). This can be seen most clearly in the populist mobilization of the involved issues. Certain issues serve particularly well as vehicles for mobilizing a sort of latent populist possibility. Van Kessel (2015), Poier, Saywald-Wedl, and Unger (2017), Smith (2010) and Taggart (2017) agree that five political issues – *immigration, regional identity, corruption and crime, integration, and economic hardship* – have a specifically high affinity to populist mobilization in Western democracies. Taggart's (2017, p. 205) hermeneutic analysis found these issues to be "appropriated" and "politicized" most frequently by populist parties in Europe. Van Kessel (2015, p.23) ran a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) with thirty-one countries to show that "the breeding ground for populist parties is especially fertile where related issues are salient" in public discourse. Populists put these issues on their agenda and bring them into wider contention, pressurizing the media and other political actors to address these issues also. According to Taggart (2017), the clearest and most commonly mentioned populist issue is immigration, particularly on the political right. Immigration addresses a strong

focus on the protection of national culture, an emphasis on the people as homogenous entity, an opposition to multiculturalism, and hostility toward outsiders and ethnic minorities. Second, regional identity relates to subnational identity politics; it expresses a rejection of central state structures and the idealization of a regional "heartland" (Taggart 2017). Third, the issue corruption and crime relates to allegations of institutional corruption, the failure of established parties, and that law and order policies require tightening (Taggart 2017; Smith 2010). A fourth populist issue addresses European/transnational integration, which summarizes populist tendencies to perceive supranational authorities and legal orders as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation (e.g., Euroscepticism). Finally, economic hardship relates to high unemployment rates and growing economic inequality, and demands to protect the national economy from global competition (Van Kessel 2015). The resulting populist accusations against the elites often come from the political left.

It is important to note that these five issues are not inherently populist themselves, but depending on their framing, they can have a high affinity with populism; furthermore, these five issues are not utilized by all populist actors (Taggart, 2017; van Kessel, 2015). What is striking about these populist issues is that most of them can be mobilized in either a left- or a right-wing form and gain high popularity. Moreover, populism and the mobilization and criticism of populist issues may be an important barometer of the health of politics because they tackle crucial key issues of contemporary politics (Taggart, 2017).

3. Overview of methodological design

This dissertation is integrated into the NCCR Democracy phase III, module 2 "Populism in the context of globalization and mediatization" (http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch) project. All of the module's team members have developed a working definition of populism and populist communication, operationalized the constructs in an extensive codebook, and implemented an overarching, international and multi-language content analysis that includes all facets of the various projects involved (Wirth et al., 2016).

3.1 Research setting and content analysis

In 2013 initiated the NCCR III populism content analysis project to assess the extent, content and presentation of populist communication in eleven Western democracies, content analyzing approximately 55'000 media texts in eight languages by 87 trained international student coders. The project assessed print news media articles during a 15-month routine period and past and current election periods. Additionally, it analyzed TV newscasts, TV talk shows, social media communications, press releases, and party manifestos.

Within module 2, this dissertation evolved out of project IP 8, "Populism and the news media", which focused on populist communication in the news media, and as an additional project, further analyzed populism on social media and in political talk shows during three time periods. *Articles II-V* resort to the data collection of the NCCR content analysis. The data for *ARTICLE I* evolved out of a pre-study of the entire NCCR populism project, which was implemented by Frank Esser and Sven Engesser in a Master's research seminar at the Department of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) at the University of Zurich.

The units of analysis in the NCCR content analysis for this project are single statements (direct and indirect) made by a politician – who is considered a speaker – in print news media, TV talk shows and social media on a target actor or a political issue. All statements can contain one or several of these statements by one speaker. The speaker, the target actor, and the issue are defined as follows:

Speaker: All direct or indirect statements by the identified politician or his or her social media accounts are considered a speaker. Because retweets are excluded from the analysis, only statements that are written by the politicians have been included in the social media analysis.

Target actor: An actor characterized or evaluated by a speaker's statement counts as a target actor and includes other politicians, organizations, elites, or the people. The speaker himself can also be a target actor when he utters a statement about himself.

Issue: An issue refers to the thematic context or policy substance of the statement addressed by a speaker's statement, such as an election, migration, or security.

3.2 Operationalization of populist communication

The main dependent and most crucial variable of this synopsis is populist communication. If the thin ideology of populism is expressed in the content of a statement, the three pillars of people-centrism, anti-elitism and restoring popular sovereignty are addressed. When communicated by political actors, these dimensions are broken down into nine populist key messages. When populist communication is related to the way and form statements are presented, we conceive it as populist communication style elements. The manner in which political actors express the populist ideology in statements refers to three major populist style dimensions – negativity, emotionality and sociability – which are composed of seven individual populist communication styles.

Populist communication is overall regarded as a formative measure (Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008) based on the six dimensions and the corresponding nine populist key messages and seven style elements. This means that messages and styles are required to be internally consistent to be reliable or valid. Key messages and style elements were operationalized as dummy variables, and for each statement we coded whether one or more of the sixteen messages or styles were present. The nine *populist key messages* and seven *populist communication styles* are operationalized using a broad set of individual categories (see Table 1 and 2). For each category, we code whether it was present in a given statement. A key message or a style element is considered present if at least one of its respective categories is identified in a statement. The operationalization of the dependent variable populist communication developed over time. In *ARTICLE I* we started at the beginning and simply deduced five ideological key elements form the definition of populism (sovereignty to the people, advocating for the people, attacking elites, ostracizing others, and invoking the heartland) as heuristic categories. This allowed us to qualitatively scan social media content for populist communication cues. A more systematic approach was implemented in *ARTICLES II* and *III*, in which we identified three core dimensions of populism and operationalized them with nine populist key messages.

Table 1: Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Key Messages

Dimension	Populist Key Messages	Underlying Ideology	Categories
Anti-Elitism	Discrediting the elite	Elites are corrupt.	Elites are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc. The elite are called names and denied morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc.
	Blaming the elite	Elites are harmful.	Elites are described as a threat/burden, responsible for negative developments/situations, or as having committed mistakes or crimes. Elites are described as not being a source of enrichment or responsible for positive developments/situations.
	Detaching the elite from the people	Elites do not represent the people.	Elites are described as not belonging to the people, not being close to the people, not knowing the people, not speaking for the people, not caring for the people, or not performing everyday actions.
People-Centrism	Stressing the people's virtues	The people are virtuous.	The people are bestowed with morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc. The people are exempt from being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc.
	Praising the people's achievements	The people are beneficial.	The people are described as being enriched or responsible for a positive development/situation. The people are described as not being a threat/burden, not being responsible for negative developments/situations, nor as having committed mistakes or crimes.
	Stating a monolithic people	The people are homogenous.	People are described as sharing common feelings, desires, or opinions.
	Demonstrating closeness to the people	The populist represents the people.	The speaker describes himself as belonging to the people, being close to the people, knowing the people, speaking for the people, caring for the people, agreeing with the people, or performing everyday actions. The speaker claims to represent or embody the people.
Restoring Sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty	The people are the ultimate sovereign.	The speaker argues for general institutional reforms to grant the people more power by introducing direct-democratic elements or increasing political participation. The speaker argues in favor of granting more power to the people within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).
	Denying elite sovereignty	The elites deprive the people of their sovereignty.	The speaker argues in favor of granting less power to elites within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).

We decided to exclude the dimension of ostracizing others from the main concept of populist communication. This consensus was reached within the NCCR module to minimize the emphasis on right-wing populism and conceptualize the thin ideology of populism for all possible add-on ideologies. Left-wing populist actors, for example, combine populism with socialism and follow an inclusive understanding of the people without horizontally excluding dangerous others, such as migrants or foreigners. The dimension of invoking a heartland was further excluded from the main concept, as it is not discussed as a crucial feature of populism in the literature (for an exception, see Taggart, 2000) and hardly ever occurred in the qualitative social media analysis of *ARTICLE I*. In addition to measuring populist communication based on the communicated content of populist messages, *ARTICLE IV* introduced and systematized populism-related communication styles. This systematization and identification of seven communication styles that have a high affinity with populism contributed to the field of populist communication in several ways, especially since the identification and systematization of populist style elements is not as established and has not achieved consensus in the field. This advancement of the dependent variable made it possible to test a much broader and inclusive understanding of populist communication by not only analyzing the content of political actors' statements but also defining how those statements are presented and which style elements are commonly used in populist communication. *ARTICLE IV* implemented the two core concepts individually in the statistical analysis and argued that populist communication overall is a combination of either messages and/or styles. The presence of one of the six dimensions was sufficient to conceive of it as populist communication. Finally, *ARTICLE V* argues for a co-occurrence of populist messages and styles. Accordingly, a statement is defined as populist if it combines at least one ideological key message and one populist style element in the same statement.The separate use of populist key messages or style elements is insufficient to classify a statement as fully populist. However, as *ARTICLES I* and *II* have shown, populism is a fragmented phenomenon and not all three ideological and all three style dimensions must be represented in a single statement. We only expect all dimensions of populist communication to be represented in the long term of the continuous communication of a politician, not in every single speech act.

Table 2: Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Communication Styles

Dimension	Populist Style Elements	Underlying Style Element	Categories
Negativity	Negativism	Paint society and its members (part of the people) "in black" by attributing negative characteristics or condemning actions/situations with negative outcome.	Targets are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, racist, etc. or are denied being benevolent, likeable, intelligent, credible, loyal, consistent, etc.
	Crisis rhetoric	Portraying a situation/development as a crisis using exaggerations, emergency rhetoric or declaring a scandal.	Speaker uses rhetorical elements of immorality, exaggeration, scandal, emergency or war rhetoric.
Emotionality	Emotional tone	Sharing positive and negative emotions or revealing feelings.	Speaker uses emotional language by expressing discrete positive (e.g., happiness, contentment, hope, pride, trust) or negative (e.g., anger, uneasiness, sadness, fear, regret, affection) emotions.
	Absolutism	Using an assertive tone and lacking relativizing words. Tendency to paint world in black and white without any shades of gray.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of absolutism by presenting something as the only conceivable option or as preposterous or unbearable.
	Patriotism	Emphasizing of the superiority of own country by referencing an idealized and utopic heartland.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of patriotism by emphasizing superiority of own country or some obscure heartland.
Sociability	Colloquialism	Preference for a simple, dialect, colloquial or vulgar language and use of nicknames to reach the ordinary people.	Speaker uses vulgar language or slang, employs sarcasm or rhetorical questions and address targets with nicknames.
	Intimization	Recounting personal and intimate details about personal life.	Targets are described in their predominately personal life by emphasizing their family or love life and making references to personal way of life or leisure activities.

4. Individual publications and results

This chapter summarizes the aim, research design, and major findings for each of the five articles that are discussed in this synopsis.

4.1 ARTICLE I: Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology

This article is one of the first attempts to investigate how politicians use populist communication on social media and questions, how populism manifests itself on Facebook and Twitter. The aim of this paper was to show deeper insights into the definitional elements of populism conceived as a thin ideology and to identify empirical types of populism by applying an in-depth analysis of politicians' communications on social media.

We theoretically identified five ideological elements and argue that populist communication manifests itself by emphasizing the sovereignty to the people, advocating for the people, attacking elites, ostracizing others, and invoking the heartland. We argue that because of network media logic, social media channels provide – especially in a hybrid media system – a perfect stage for populist actors to establish a close connection to the people and circumvent gatekeepers.

4.1.1 Research design

To investigate whether and how populism manifests itself on social media, we conducted a qualitative text analysis of typical Facebook and Twitter posts. We focused on four European countries (AT, CH, IT & UK) to identify cross-national patterns. For each country, we included both a populist party (FPÖ, SVP, M5S, & UKIP) and the dominant social democrat and conservative parties (which serve as a control group). Within each party, we identified high status politicians (leaders, chairman, & secretaries) and those with a very active communication behavior and media presence (vocal backbenchers or regular talk show guests). We examined all official Facebook and Twitter accounts during a period of six months (January 1-June 30, 2013).

For the data analysis, we proceeded in three steps. First, we used the five ideological key elements (sovereignty to the people, advocating for the people, attacking elites, ostracizing others, and invoking the heartland) as heuristic categories and scanned the collected Facebook and Twitter content of all posts that fell into at least one of these categories. Second, we selected posts that we regarded as typical cases for their respective categories. Third, we

subjected these posts to a hermeneutic text analysis to illustrate how politicians utilized, modified, differentiated, and combined the five key ideological elements.

4.1.2 Findings

A major finding of this study is that populism manifested itself in a fragmented form on social media. Although all five key definitional elements appeared across the posts and tweets under analysis, these elements were generally isolated from each other or clustered in pairs at most. We offer three potential reasons for this fragmentation: (1) politicians may reduce the complexity of the thin ideology to make it more comprehensive for their followers; (2) politicians may keep the populist ideology ambiguous and malleable to open the possibility that users can complement it with their own political attitudes; and (3) fragments of populism may travel more easily below the radar of political opponents and critical observers. We further found populist communication elements across countries, parties and politicians' status levels. Both populist politicians and politicians from mainstream parties utilize ideological key elements of populism.

In terms of individual ideological elements, the analysis revealed that by demanding sovereignty to the people, politicians include aspects of democratic theory in their arguments. We showed that advocacy for the people is more than the mere mention of the word 'people', as suggested by previous studies. It typically implies that the populist actor perceives himself as a true representative of the people. Furthermore, we illustrated that the elites attacked by populist actors – whether they are political, economic, legal, supranational, or media elites – may vary substantially. We demonstrated that the ostracism of others can be conducted either explicitly by openly denouncing certain social groups or indirectly by means of implicit negation and accusing others of ostracism. Our analysis indicates that the heartland can be triggered by the mention of a single name or date, depending on the cultural background. Moreover, we identified combinations of ideological elements from the spheres of the people and the elite. We could also come up with one example spanning the full circle of the populist argument from popular sovereignty over attacks on the elite to advocacy for the people. This example proves that, in particular cases, it is also possible that relatively high doses of concentrated populist ideology are transmitted through social media.

We concluded that social media are a particularly well-suited channel to meet the communicative preferences of populist actors and that they provide them with a convenient instrument to spread their messages.

4.2 ARTICLE II: Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries

The second paper builds upon the findings of *ARTICLE I* and analyzes the precise relations between populist communication and social media, which has been mostly neglected in the research field. The aim of this paper was to systematically investigate the extent to which political actors use populist communication on social media and to disentangle the differences among a) extreme parties b) opposition parties and c) Facebook and Twitter.

We define populism as a thin ideology that consists of three core concepts (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring sovereignty). When this ideology is communicated to the public, the actor himself becomes a crucial element of populism by using a set of nine populist key messages.[8] We argued that social media are particularly well-suited and beneficial channel for populism for four main reasons: they provide direct access to the public without external interference; they offer the possibility of establishing a close and direct connection to the people; they foster the potential for targeted, personalized forms of communication; and they can create a feeling of community, belonging and recognition among otherwise scattered groups.

Three hypotheses were tested in this paper. First, we argued that populism can be combined with different ideologies and is not an exclusively right-wing phenomenon. We argued that parties at the fringes of the political spectrum are especially inclined to use populist communication, which has previously been identified in party manifestos and press releases. Second, we argue that being in opposition to the government positively influences the amount of populist communication. Populist parties are neither durable nor sustainable parties of government, they remain in opposition, and once they enter the government, their unique strength becomes a disadvantage. Finally, we argue that the characteristic of a communication channel matters and argued that populist communication is higher on Facebook than on Twitter for four reasons: (i) higher reciprocal messages exchange, which enhances interpersonal communications and foster social capital, (ii) higher proximity, since Facebook is not as anonymous and the connection between users is more intensive, personal, and intimate, (iii) the fact that Twitter is an elite medium, used for professional purposes and

[8] In the original article, we use a different term for key messages (populist communication strategies). The use of these terms is merely due to different labeling, and the two terms do not differ conceptually.

to consume and circulate information, and (iv) the fact that Facebook has no character limitations.

4.2.1 Research design

We conducted a semi-automated content analysis of Facebook posts and Tweets by 88 politicians from six countries during a three-month routine period (September 1-November 30, 2015). The selected six Western democracies (CH, DE, IT, FR, UK and USA) provide deficient variability regarding political systems, strong and weak populist parties and different consumption of political information on social media, functioning as a robustness check to increase the validity and generalizability of our findings. For each country, we selected the five most influential parties (from left to right), including a populist party. Within each party, we selected politicians with high hierarchical position and politicians with high social media resonance. We downloaded the verified Facebook and Twitter feeds and coded all verifiable statements. We included 845 Facebook and 555 Twitter statements by 88 politicians in the final analysis.

The unit of analysis is a single statement made by a politician's social media account (speaker) on a target actor or an issue. The nine populist key messages are operationalized using a broad set of categories and for each category we coded whether it was present in a given social media statement. The dependent variable – the populism index – is present if at least one of the nine key messages is present. The 29 parties are placed in the left and right spectrum using the Chapel Hill Experts Survey and we calculated an extremism score by subtracting the theoretical center of the scale. Additionally, a dummy for opposition party and Facebook was calculated.

4.2.2 Findings

To test the three hypotheses, we conducted analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) using the populism index as the dependent variable and for the purpose of multivariate validation, we tested the effects of all three independent variables on populist communication in a single OLS regression model. We find clear evidence that an extreme party position favors an increased use of populist communication on social media. Political actors placed on the left and right fringes of the party spectrum (both right- and left-wing extreme parties) draw on populist messages more often than centrist parties do. This result supports the first hypothesis. Our study further demonstrates – on the solid base of a six-country sample – that

opposition parties use greater amounts of populist communication on social media than government parties. This finding corroborates our second hypothesis and fits earlier findings that populist communication is mainly used to attack and discredit the political elite by simultaneously advocating for the people. The third important result of the study is the necessary differentiation between the two social media platforms and the conclusion that both extreme and opposition parties are particularly reliant on Facebook for their populist key messages. We can support our third hypothesis because Facebook seems to be the preferred channel for political actors to advocate for the people and blame or criticize elites.

We further confirmed the results of *ARTICLE I* by showing that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form. The dimension of restoring sovereignty is almost absent, and the two core dimensions of populism hardly ever co-occur on social media. Despite the fragmented empirical manifestation of populism, we argue that our strategy for identifying the three core dimensions of populism is a fruitful approach. Additionally, we were able to identify some statements that included both dimensions in one statement. Moreover, 20% of our investigated politicians combine at least two dimensions across all of their messages, which means that at the politicians' level, social media users are confronted with both dimensions.

We concluded that this study adds to the current research on populist communication in the media by systematically investigating how politicians use populist key messages in their day-to-day social media communication.

4.3 ARTICLE III: Bipolar populism? The use of anti-elitism and people-centrism by Swiss parties on social media

The aim of this paper was to investigate the result that extreme parties use more populist communication in more detail and focus on the two dimensions of people-centrism and anti-elitism in the exemplary case of Switzerland. After a brief comparative overview of parties from five Western democracies, we conducted an in-depth analysis of how five major Swiss parties use populist communication and whether they prefer people-centrism or anti-elitism in their messages on Facebook and Twitter. We built upon the arguments established in *ARTICLE II* that although politicians choose from a variety of communication channels, the new opportunities provided by social media are especially beneficial for populist communication.

4.3.1 Research design

We conducted a statement-level quantitative content analysis of the Tweets and Facebook posts of 77 politicians from five European countries (CH, DE, FR, IT & UK) during a three-month period in 2015. For each country, we investigated the five largest parties in parliament across the left-right spectrum. In Switzerland, this included – from left to right – the Green Party (GPS), the Social Democrats (SP), the Christian Democrats (CVP), the Liberals (FDP) and the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Across all countries, we selected politicians for inclusion in our study according to two criteria: they either held a high position within government or their party (e.g., head of government or party leader) or had high resonance on social media (followers on Twitter) as of January 2015. For the final analysis, we considered only Tweets and Facebook posts by politicians that explicitly addressed an issue or social actor. This yielded 1'220 social media statements, 217 of which were made by Swiss politicians.

Behind the three dimensions of people-centrism, anti-elitism and demands for restoring sovereignty, we identified nine concrete populist key messages. When at least one of the nine key messages was evident in a social media post, we treated this occurrence as a manifestation of 'populist communication'. To locate European parties and their politicians on the left-right scale, we relied on the classification system of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES).

4.3.2 Findings

To explore whether parties from either end of the political spectrum are more prone to using populist communication, we conducted linear and quadratic OLS regressions. We used the number of populist key messages on social media as the dependent variable and the CHES score for parties as the independent variable. Our findings show a clear U-curve pattern, illustrating that extreme parties use more populist key messages than center parties across the five countries. Switzerland represents an "exemplary case" in this regard, with 93 percent of Swiss parties' political communication explained by this U-curved pattern. We can confirm that it is not only the commonly labeled populist SVP that uses populist key messages, but that the GPS and FDP also rely on populist communication. By analyzing the two major dimensions of populism separately, we also demonstrated that left-wing parties tend to emphasize people-centrist messages, whereas right-wing parties tend to emphasize anti-elitist messages. It is noteworthy that the two dimensions invite different messages of political

communication: whereas the first is more advocative ('pro' people), the second is more conflictive in nature ('against' elites).

We conclude that party extremism positively influences the overall amount of populist communication, especially in Switzerland. Our recommendation for future research is to include more extreme parties in studies of various countries. For Switzerland, it would be interesting to incorporate the communication behavior of far-left parties such as the Alternative List (AL) or Swiss Party of Labor (PdA), along with far-right parties, such as the Ticino League (LdT) or the Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG), to further support the validity of the U-curve pattern.

4.4 ARTICLE IV: Populists prefer social media over talk shows. An analysis of populist messages and stylistic elements across six countries

The fourth paper first aims to further develop the understanding of populist communication by identifying and systematizing populism-related communication styles in addition to populist key messages. Second, we highlight the importance of examining populist communication in multi-channel studies and investigating whether the channel characteristics of social media and political talk shows, along with party properties (extremist and challenger parties), influence the levels of populist communication.

Focusing on political actors' self-presentation and their communicative approaches, two main traditions in the literature can be identified, as populist communication has been defined as either an ideology or a communication style. We argue that these two traditions are not exclusive and following Kriesi (2018), Sorensen (2017) and Krämer (2017) we highlight the important issue that populist communication is a combination of key messages (content) and communication styles (form). In an intensive literature research, we identified seven common communication styles that have a high affinity with populism and test whether these styles form distinct dimensions (RQ1).

In addition to these research questions, this paper formulates three hypotheses. First, we argue that both Facebook and Twitter have several opportunity structures that enhance the potential for populist communication. In particular the possibility of fully circumventing traditional gatekeepers and the full autonomy of speech and issue framing are considered beneficial aspects. Although talk shows present another ideal stage for populism, the positive advantages of social media prevail. Second, we built on previous results (*ARTICLE II & III*) and tested whether the effect of extreme parties is robust across the three communication

channels. In addition to extreme parties, we argue that challenger parties have a high affinity with populism because they are perceived to be a threat to the party establishment because they highlight problems that have been neglected by mainstream parties, mobilize outside of electoral channels, and resort to creative, innovative forms of protest communication. Thus, these parties may rely more on populist communication to improve their electoral chances and media visibility.

4.4.1 Research design

To test our hypotheses, we followed a three-step sampling procedure. First, we identified relevant countries. Second, we sampled the relevant political talk shows and listed all appearing politicians. Third, we collected the social media material of these politicians. We conducted a content analysis of social media and talk show statements (N = 2067) in six countries from 31 parties in six countries (CH, DE, FR, IT, UK, and US) during a three-month non-election period in 2015. The unit of analysis is a single statement made by a politician – who is considered a speaker – about a target actor or an issue. For each statement we coded whether a category of the newly identified seven populist communication styles and the key messages are present. Populist communication was considered a combination of messages and styles. If a statement included one of the six dimensions (e.g., people-centrism or sociability), populist communication was considered present. In addition to this combination, we tested the hypotheses for messages and styles in isolation. We assigned party extremism using CHES and coded parties founded after 1980 as challenger parties. Furthermore, a dummy for Facebook and Twitter (versus political talk shows) was calculated.

4.4.2 Findings

In the first step, we conducted a principal component factor analysis with the seven style elements and identified three distinct dimensions: *Negativity* is composed of negativism and crisis rhetoric, *emotionality* is composed of emotional tone, absolutism, and patriotism, and *sociability* is composed of colloquialism and intimization. We considered this finding an important empirical contribution to the literature on populist styles themselves, and it provided the basis for our further analyses.

To test our three hypotheses in a second step, we conducted twelve multilevel models with maximum-likelihood estimation. All twelve multilevel models present clear support for the three postulated hypotheses. We demonstrated that populist communication (and styles

in isolation) by various political actors is higher on Facebook and Twitter than on political talk shows. For populist key messages, we only find a significant effect for Facebook. Key messages on Twitter, however, are not more common than in political talk shows. If the two social media platforms are compared, we can conclude that Facebook is the stronger predictor of populist communication and that political actors tend to prefer Facebook for their populist communication. We reinforce the argument described in ARTICLE III, i.e., that Facebook is more suitable for populist communication. We also find support for the hypotheses on party level and demonstrated that both challenger and extreme parties use more populist communication (messages and styles as well) when they communicate on Twitter, Facebook or talk shows.

By comparing the three media channels, we corroborate that populist communication is indeed connected to Facebook and Twitter and that the advantages of social media in bypassing gatekeepers and disseminating messages without interference are beneficial to populist communication. These results provide the first empirical evidence for the theoretical assumption that online opportunity structures and populist communication logic interact. The findings demonstrate that while many commonly labeled populist parties are challenger and extreme parties at the same time, political parties holding only one of these properties also employ a high degree of populism on social media and talk shows. This result affirms our rationale that party extremism and challenger parties are two independent properties that are relevant explanatory factors for populist communication.

We conclude that the integration of the two diverging perspectives on populist ideology and populist style is a fruitful and rewarding approach. We further established that social media is more useful for disseminating populist political communication than talk shows – contesting previous studies that identified the importance of talk shows.

4.5 ARTICLE V: Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press

The aim of the fifth and final paper was to explore favorable opportunity structures for populist communication identify which channel, issue and party types have a high affinity with populist content and style elements. With regard to channels we distinguished between those with high and those with low journalistic interference and compared populist communication on Facebook, Twitter, talk shows, and the news media. In addition to channel type, we identified political issues that have a high affinity with populism. Finally, we distinguished

between members of populist/non-populist parties on the one hand and backbenchers/frontbenchers on the other hand. We follow the argument established in ARTICLE IV and argue that in our understanding, the ideology of populism cannot be communicated without stylistic elements. Empirically, the core characteristics of populism manifest themselves in both content and form, in other words, as the *co-occurrence* of ideological expression and communication, which means that we expect political actors to express their populist ideology in the content of their statements while using style elements to emphasize further their overall points and themes.

We identified four favorable opportunity structures for populism. First, following the theory of media interventionism, we expected that the lower the degree of journalistic interference in a channel, the greater the potential for unfiltered, unrestricted populism. We therefore argued that populist communication is highest in social media (channel without interference), followed by talk shows (channel with medium intervention) and news media (channel with heavy intervention). Second, the articulation of political issues with a high affinity with populism should foster the utilization of populist communication. We argued that five political issues – *immigration, regionalism, corruption and crime, European integration,* and *economic hardship* – are the most emphasized by populist actors, especially on social media. Finally, six hypotheses related to the populist affinity with certain parties and politicians were postulated. It is expected that members of populist parties tend to use more populism in their communication than non-populist politicians, especially when they communicate on Facebook or Twitter and about populist issues. Because political outsiders or backbenchers can use the anti-establishment dimension of populist communication particularly effectively and simultaneously establish a closeness to the people, backbenchers are expected to employ higher degrees of populist communication. Because they often employ a digital campaign strategy to spread their messages and break into the mainstream media and focus on issues with high news value, this should be especially pronounced on social media and when they discuss political issue that have an affinity with populism.

4.5.1 Research design

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a multi-national content analysis in six countries (CH, DE, FR, IT, UK, US) in 2015. We followed an individual matching approach on the actor level across several media channels. This sampling strategy required a four-step procedure: We 1) identified relevant countries, 2) sampled political talk shows and recorded all

statements of the appearing politicians, 3) downloaded the verified social media statements of the relevant politicians, and 4) collected all statements in the news media of the same politicians during the period of investigation. The unit of analysis is statements by the 103 politicians included in the sample that address target actors or political issues. Key messages and style elements were dummy coded and the dependent variable – populist communication – was present if at least one of the nine populist key messages and one of seven populist communication styles co-occurred in the same statement. 14 political issues (on the basis of 133 sub-issues) were coded and divided into populist and non-populist issues. For politicians, we distinguished between those who had a party affiliation with a commonly known populist party and recoded with they were holding a key position in government so that we could identify backbenchers and frontbenchers.

4.5.2 Findings

To test our nine hypotheses, we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) using the co-occurrence of populist key messages and communication styles as the dependent variable.[9] We demonstrated that the amount of populist communication is dependent on the media channel. Contrary to expectations it is not only low journalistic interventions on social media that explain the high popularity of populist communication. The politicians of all six countries seem to have surprising success in getting their populist messages and styles into the newspapers and we reported even higher levels in the news media than on Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, we showed that the talk show bonus for populist communication no longer holds in digital and hybrid media systems. We prove that issues that have high affinity with populism contain much more populist communication than non-populist issues and that this is particularly evident in social media communication. We find clear evidence that members of populist parties indeed use more populist communication in their statements than non-populist actors. Even if mainstream parties sometimes resort to populist communication elements, commonly known populist actors combine populist messages and styles in every tenth statement, and they apply populist communication logic, especially on Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, journalists' selection of populist communication is also more pronounced for populist actors. Backbenchers also tend to use more populist communication than politicians holding a key position, but only when they fully circumvent

[9] We cross-validated our findings with a binary logistic regression model.

traditional gatekeepers by using social media. Thus being a member of a populist party is a much stronger predictor of the use of populist communication than being a backbencher.

We concluded that populist communication is especially thriving in certain niche areas because populist actors resort more often to communication strategies and political issues that have a high affinity with populism contain higher levels of populist communication elements. We also provide evidence that populism depends on media channels and passes through the gates of traditional news media much more easily than when politicians use this communication logic themselves on social media or talk shows, where they can benefit from the autonomy of journalists' selection processes. We conclude by presenting and discussing six explanations for this surprising finding.

5. Conclusion and outlook

In the final chapter of this synopsis, the major findings are summarized and classified. I will critically discuss the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the results. To conclude, I will address limitations and discuss future research possibilities.

5.1 Summary and classification of results

The findings of this cumulative dissertation project contribute to international and intermedia populist communication research in several ways by setting out to explain two major unsolved aspects within the field. The first main goal was to theoretically and empirically define the concept of populist communication, which despite the exponential growth of populism research, has still not reached a full consensus. As the project proceeded over the years, the development and clarity of the dependent variable progressed with it. In line with established populism scholars, I conclude that the combination of Mudde's (2004) ideology-centered and Hawkin's (2010) discourse-centered definition of populism is remunerative and argue that populist communication is a combination of ideology and style. Whereas the ideological component is expressed in the content of a statement (*what* is being said), the stylistic elements refer to the form of the statement (*how* is something said). I am in line with Wodak (2015, p. 3), who argues that populist communication always "combines and integrates form and content", which is supported by Kriesi (2018, p. 13), who states that "populist content and populist style tend to go together". Moreover, de Vreese et al. (2018, p. 3) reinforce this understanding of populist communication by arguing that "the communicative tools used for spreading populist ideas are just as central as the populist ideas themselves". I therefore take a communication-centered approach and consider populism as a communication phenomenon that is operationalized by three dimensions of the content (key messages) and three dimensions of the form (style elements). The advantage of this approach is the ability to empirically determine degrees of populist communication by various political actors across various media settings. By empirically operationalizing and investigating the utilization of both messages and styles by political actors, I go a step further than the theoretical discussion by the authors mentioned above and contribute both theoretically and empirically to the international populist communication research field. By providing a systematization and solution for the empirical operationalization of both populist messages and styles, the first part of research question 1 *(RQ1: How can we define populist*

communication and how is it utilized by broad spectrum of political actors in different countries across various media channels?) is answered and not only enables the investigation of the other research questions, but also builds a solid foundation for future populist communication research. In particular, the systematic derivation and identification of populism-related communication styles and its empirical verification presents an added value of my on dissertation project in the context of the entire NCCR populism module. This independent and unique contribution enables the investigation of a more comprehensive understanding of populist communication.

This brings me to the second main goal of this dissertation project, which was to clarify *who* expresses and *to what extent* political actors can spread populism in their messages and more importantly, which context and niche aspects of channel, issue and party/politician types are fostering the spread of populist communication in a digital and hybrid media environment. For a summary and visual overview of the major key findings, please see Figure 2.

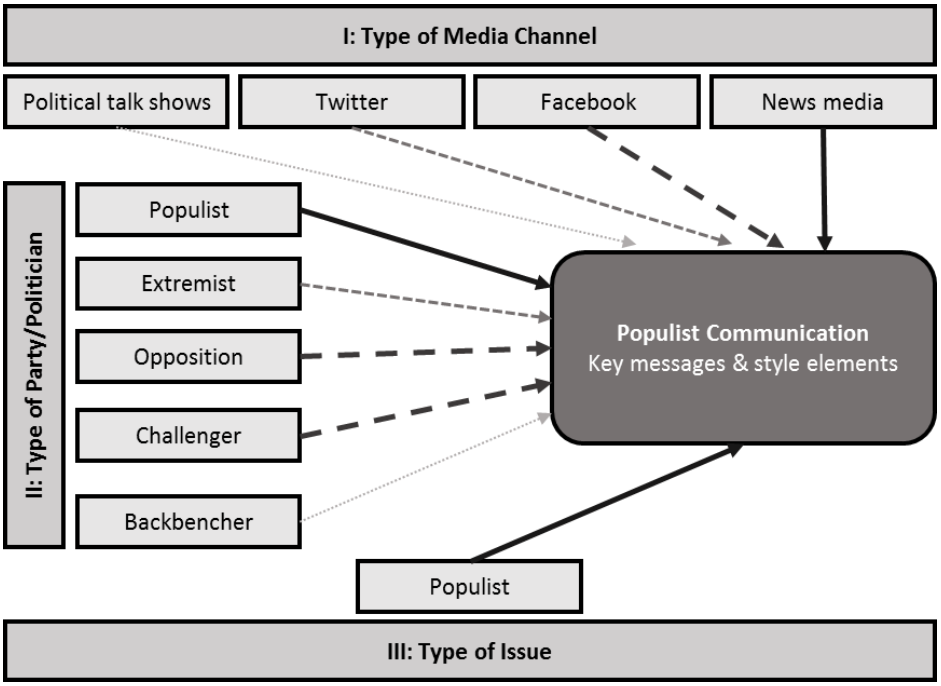

Figure 3: Visual summary of key results

Note: Thickness and darkness indicate the influence of each independent variable for the utilization of populist communication.

First, I consider the *type of media channel*. This project strives to compare populist communication across various media channels and theoretically argue and empirically explain why certain degrees of populism are expected and documented. *ARTICLES I-III* demonstrate that social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter are especially lucrative and beneficial channels for populist communication. Political actors have adopted their communication strategies to the hybrid media system environment and one relatively successful communication strategy is the utilization of both populist messages and styles on social media channels. The online opportunity structures offered by digital social media platforms to political actors provide new possibilities for a direct, unmediated and interactive communication with followers and voters. These and other aspects are crucial for the explanation of why populist communication and social media networks form a close and successful relationship. In the digital and hybrid media environment, political actors can no longer completely omit the influences of digital media, and especially in election campaigns and at critical times, political actors need to incorporate new digital media channels into their communication portfolio. This concept is in line with the fact that audiences – especially younger generations – are continuing to shift away from mainstream outlets toward new digital and social media channels, where parties avoiding the traditional news media are more visible (Fisher et al., 2018; Schroeder, 2017). By comparing Facebook and Twitter, both *ARTICLE II* and *ARTICLES IV* and *V* established that the four characteristics of the social network channel Facebook (compared to Twitter) are especially favorable to the spread of populist communication, in all six investigated countries. It seems that when political actors want to achieve their full populism potential, the channel of choice is Facebook. There they can reach their like-minded followers, who are usually ordinary citizens, whereas on Twitter the user base is more differentiated and mostly used by professionals or highly educated citizens.

The comparison of social media with political talk shows in *ARTICLE IV* and the news media in *ARTICLE V* demonstrates that we can no longer confirm the bonus for populist communication that has long been attributed to talk shows (e.g., Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011). With the exception of US and British talk shows, political actors are more likely to obtain the possibility to articulate populist messages and use populist styles in media channels with medium journalistic intervention. Nor does the present audience of talk shows or direct exchange with other media or political actors foster the use of populist communication. The talk show setting and the round table discussion format might hinder

political actors from making straightforward and bold announcements. In the digital age and compared to other media channels, talk shows are no longer the best stage from which to spread populist communication. Political actors instead prefer either social media channels or news media for their populist communication.

This brings us to the most surprising and unexpected finding with regard to the comparison of types of media channels. As established in *ARTICLE V*, political actors have achieved great success in entering the news media with their populist statements. Contrary to our theoretical assumptions, news media are willing to include populist actors, their issues and their communication repertoires in their news reporting. How can it be explained that the supposedly interventionist news media contains such high degrees of populism statements by political actors? First, populist issues and populist actors meet the selection criteria of traditional news media because their often controversial, emotion-evoking, dubious, and polarizing messages that contain per se high news values (Mazzoleni, 2008). Second, populist actors often take extreme positions on hotly debated issues for which they claim issue ownership and problem-solving competence (e.g., the migration crisis) which results in high news values and media actors even feeling obligated to report about them for reasons of balance (Esser et al., 2017). Third, journalists pay very close attention to what populist politicians argue on other media channels – especially on social media – and incorporate those arguments into their newspaper articles (Rogstad, 2016). Fourth, populist politicians do not use social media solely "to bypass" traditional news media but above all "to influence" the news media agenda with their posts and tweets – as Trump exemplified in the 2016 presidential election campaign (Chadwick, 2017, p. 263). This influence is even more fertile the more an individual Tweet by a political actor is successful in the network and receives many retweets (Wells et al., 2016). Fifth, the news media may only report about populist politicians and their messages to criticize and deconstruct them. My own qualitative observation of the news article in *ARTICLE V* supports Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, and Wirth's (2018a) conclusion that most news outlets actively oppose populist actors by negatively evaluating or challenging them. Finally, populism is a buzzword and a highly debated issues across all international media outlets. Populist parties are successful in winning elections: their issues are fueled by financial, migration or transnational crises and cannot simply be ignored by media actors, who must fulfill their professional role as an information provider. To conclude and answer the second research question (*RQ2*), although social media channels –

especially Facebook – provide several favorable opportunity structures for populist communication, statements in the news media still contain the highest degrees of populism.

Second, *types of party/politician* were investigated. The aim in regard to party and politician properties was to theoretically identify the characteristics of political actors that have a high affinity with populist communication and empirically test whether political actors who have these attributes ascribed employ populist communication to a higher degree. I demonstrated that members of extremist (tested in *Articles II-IV*), opposition (*ARTICLE II*), challenger (*ARTICLE IV*) and populist parties (*ARTICLE V*), as expected, utilize higher levels of populist communication. On the individual level, politicians with a backbencher role tend to use more populism than frontrunners holding a key position in government or their own party (*ARTICLE V*). I found strong support for all five properties across all investigated countries. One exception is that of Italian and French extremist parties, as we identified a linear increase of populist communication from left to right-wing parties in Southern Europe. I speculate that the low degrees of populism by extreme left-wing parties is influenced by the disillusionment of Italian and French left-wing parties since the 1960s. If the five party components are compared, the data show that being a member of a populist party along with having a challenger and/or opposition status, is especially likely to result in widespread populist communication. Party extremism (at least in Southern Europe) is not as influential for the usage of populist communication. The ultimate effect of backbenchers is rather limited, which could be mainly explained by our data sampling strategy for *ARTICLES IV* and *V*, which started with politicians appearing in political talk shows. Nevertheless, I find clear support for the proposition that all political actors incorporated one or more of the properties proposed in the third research question (*RQ3*), resulting in a higher utilization of populist communication compared to other mainstream, moderate, governing, established, non-populist, and/or influential party members.

Finally, I consider the *type of issue*. In the literature and global media agenda, populist actors are often strongly associated with certain specific political policies or issues. The main goal of the fourth research question (RQ4) therefore was to theoretically identify political issues that have a high affinity with populism and empirically test whether populist issues contain more populist communication elements in its elaboration than non-populist issues. In *ARTICLE V*, I find strong support for this assumption across all investigated media channels and included countries. If international political actors discuss one of the five issues with a high

connection to populism – immigration, regionalism, corruption and crime, European integration, and economic hardship – the degree of populism in these statements is comparatively much higher. These five political topics not only have a theoretical relation to populism but also are typical issues that are "owned" by populist actors. Having issue ownership over a political policy allows parties to focus and build their campaigns on these issues, consciously ignoring other political topics (Petrocik, 1996). The greater the media attention to owned issues, the more successful the party is in the election and its vote maximizing strategy (Thesen, Green-Pedersen, & Mortensen, 2017). Populist actors may deliberately mobilize these populist issues, fueling them with populist messages and styles to be effective in their communication strategy. Because several political issues, such as migration or Euroscepticism, are occupied by populist actors and follow a clear narrative, other mainstream political actors may even argue in a similar vein when addressing these specific populist affine issues. To conclude and answer research question four (RQ4), discussing political issues that resonate well with populism indeed results in a higher populist communication compared to the mobilization of political topics, such as welfare or education.

To summarize the findings, I have demonstrated that all variables that have a high affinity with populism on all three investigates types resulted in a higher usage of both populist key messages and populist style elements. This result leads to the overall conclusion, that certain political issues, specific party properties and channel characteristics provide excellent opportunity structures for populism. However, these different types are not isolated from one another. Crucial for explaining the spread of populism is the fact that multiple conditions on all levels and various opportunity structures must be jointly and simultaneously observed. *ARTICLE V* in particular demonstrated that a high spread of populist communication depends on the interaction effect of influential and populism affine factors. For example, populist communication on Facebook is especially relevant when talking about a political issue that has an affinity with populism or members of populist parties. In contrast backbenchers employ a different digital strategy and turn to Twitter to spread their populist messages. The first step of this dissertation identified several crucial factors at three different context levels that explain the rise of populist communication in the media. Populist communication in single speech acts or statement is a fragmented phenomenon and only the entire communication strategy of an individual actor shows a more complete picture. Moreover, the combination of certain niche aspects is particularly likely to allow populist communication to display its full

potential. The combination of talking about issues with an affinity for populism on Facebook or following a backbencher on Twitter may explain why populism is omnipresent in news coverage. These might be exactly the posts and tweets that one remembers and thinks about when discussing the potential of populist communication and its omnipresence in the media.

5.2 Theoretical, methodological and practical implications

The above-discussed key findings have implications that I would like to address. Starting with the theoretical findings, I stress four crucial points. First, I provide the definition and empirical operationalization of populist communication as a co-occurrence of both messages and styles in a clear progression of populism research from a communication science perspective. By jointly analyzing two of the core concepts and traditions of populism combined, I provide an excellent measurement for grasping the phenomenon holistically. In particular, the actor and media perspective taken by this project allows us to compare different degrees of populist communication. I believe that this approach is much more fruitful and effective than analyzing populism as a binary concept or only focusing on one strain of the two-folded concept. A politician, a party or a media actor is not just populist or not populist – he/she is more or less populist in communication, which is a matter of degree, depending on various relevant factors. Second, incorporating Mudde's (2004) argument of a populist *Zeitgeist*, the definition and measurement of populist communication as I promote it demonstrate that populism is not a black-and-white phenomenon, and many gray layers lie between it. My project proves that it is not only commonly known and labeled populist actors who use the successful populist communication strategy. To some extent, each and every political actor in our studies utilized some populist communication elements. As *ARTICLE III* has demonstrated focus some more on the advocative aspects of populism (in this case left-wing Swiss parties) others (right-wing Swiss parties) incorporate the conflictive, anti-elitism aspects. Independent of how messages and styles are combined, I agree with Mudde (2004) and argue that in the digital media and politic landscape, a populist *Zeitgeist* does still exist and displays itself in the communication strategies of all political actors. A third theoretical implication is the surprising result that populist communication is not only highly relevant and prevalent in social media communication: professional journalists also include these statements and issues in their day-to-day news coverage. I have already discussed some explanations for this phenomenon. Crucial in my view is how populist content and form are moderated by journalists and embedded in news articles. We know from our own data and

from Wettstein et al. (2018a) that populist statements are often critically contested by media or political actors. Even if the main goal of populist actors is to receive any news coverage according to the principle "there is no such thing as bad publicity", journalists have the opportunity to classify, critically discuss, challenge and moderate populism in their news coverage. Of course, this could backfire and play into the hands of populist actors, who take every opportunity to blame the corrupt, dishonest, and fake news producing press for bad coverage. Trump has mastered this playbook, and several direct attacks on the media can be found in his Twitter feed. Even if the critical evaluation of populism in the news media poses a risk, it is important to have a control mechanism and to prevent news coverage from reaching the public unfiltered and uncommented. On social media this critical classification by media actors does not occur. On the contrary, research has even demonstrated that populist messages spread on social media result in higher popularity cues (Bobba, 2018), which means that if political actors use elements of populism in their Facebook and Twitter statements, they are more likely to receive likes, shares, or retweets. Higher popularity indicators of statements in turn influence how the statements are processed by algorithms and open the content of the Facebook post or tweet to a much wider audience. By liking, sharing or retweeting, the network of a political actors is enlarged and enables him not only to reach his own followers (*primary audience*) but also spread his messages to a *secondary audience* (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015). A high level of response within the *primary audience* thus increases the chance that user groups from remote user communities (*secondary audience*) will also see the statement and (at best) even react to it. During election campaigns, this approach via the *primary audience* to the *secondary audience* offers political actors a promising option to reach not only their own voter base but also (and above all) to reach a new potential electorate indirectly via recommendations from their social media network (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). If populism fosters this process by pushing the popularity indicators and widening the secondary audience potential, populist online communication is not without its risks. This brings me to my final theoretical implication and the question of whether social media is a catalyst for populist communication. As we have seen, populist communication and social media channels are closely linked and the opportunity structures of Twitter and Facebook can be beneficial for the spread of populist statements. As my research has shown, social media are not the only media promoting populism and in my opinion, social media channels are merely an additional tool or media channel that political

actors can use to communicate. Surely Twitter, Facebook and other digital media have systematically and fundamentally changed the media landscape. Political systems and political actors can no longer neglect them. However, I would not go so far as to argue that social media are the only reason for the current rise and success of populist actors around the globe. I would instead argue that social media channels offer a great potential and if used professionally and correctly, can make a huge difference in a politician's campaign strategy. Former US president Barack Obama, Donald Trump or the Spanish movement Podemos are three examples that have used social media channels very successfully in their election campaigns and have fully exploited the opportunities and potentials of new digital media channels. One clear advantage of social media channels is the possibility to test and scale new communication efforts or strategies effectively and in a timely manner. Networks' reactions may be used as a proxy for public opinion and allow politicians to contrast and test different campaign strategies, slogans or general communication efforts against each other to identify the most successful ones. However, social media are still just a communication tool and may only be influential within the right combination of communication strategies, including various communication channels. To summarize the potential of social media, I would argue that mainstream media still set the agenda, but social media can surely be vehicles to influence them in crucial aspects (e.g., Schroeder, 2017).

In addition to theoretical implications, I highlight certain methodological aspects. The measurement of populist communication presented by the entire NCCR populism project is an important contribution to the field of populist communication research. Along with the established measurement of populism as an ideology with three dimensions (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring sovereignty), my project identified and systematized style elements used by political actors that have a high affinity with populist communication. In *ARTICLE IV*, I theoretically argue why the seven identified communication styles have an affinity with populism, systematizing them along three dimensions (negativity, emotionality, and sociability) and show in the multilevel analysis that messages and styles tend to go together. By analyzing the combination and co-occurrence of both messages and styles, populist communication by political actors can be entirely investigated and help us to fully understand the rise and omnipresence of populism in the media. As a second methodological implication, I highlight the importance of multi-channel studies within the field of political communication in general and especially in populist communication research. By comparing four intensively

used channels by politicians, I was able to demonstrate the importance of traditional news channels in the spread of populist communication. Without investigating single channels in isolation, this comparison and important finding could not have been detected. Finally, I argue that a multi-actor approach is extremely useful, as we have seen that it is not only alleged populists or right-wing actors who utilize populist communication elements in their messages. By neglecting moderate, mainstream and governing parties, the actual degree of populist communication in comparison to heavy users could not be analyzed. Furthermore, this approach allowed me to find evidence of a populist Zeitgeist by including actors from across the political spectrum and demonstrating that all of them use some degree of populist communication.

The overall findings also have practical implications. Populist communication is used by all political actors and appears in all media channels to a certain degree. Some actors are extremely successful with their populist communication strategy: they receive a great deal of attention, set the agenda and highlight issues, win votes, and play a major role within their media and political systems. From the viewpoint of individual political actors, it could make sense to jump on the bandwagon of success and implement populism in their communication portfolio. If the implementation of a populist communication strategy is worthwhile for every political actor however is an empirical question that is not investigated within this dissertation project. Nevertheless, the effects of populist communication on citizens should be investigated further. From the audience perspective, the results indicate that we all encounter populist communication regardless of which media we consume. The principle that citizens first and foremost should consume news and be informed is important. However, as the dose of populist communication they receive relates to their media preferences, they should be aware of their media diet, consume different media and channel types at the same time and above all be critical news media consumers. A balanced mixture of both traditional and digital media could help citizens to be well-informed and base their democratic decisions on a profound and solid basis. As populism itself is both a threat and corrective for democracies, it is normatively not a dangerous or alarming result, that we find populist communication to be present in the media or circulated by all political actors from time to time. Nevertheless, the findings should attract the attention of legislators and governments. Important aspects might be the strengthening of media literacy from early on in the education sector. Especially younger citizens, whose media diet is predominantly digital orientated, might be affected by

critical, anti-elitist and exclusionist populist communication and an early education in a conscientious media use might attenuate the influence of populist sentiments and promote a critical and responsible media consumption. Another crucial aspect could be the promotion of (press) subsidies to ensure media diversity in a country. As especially professional news media are able to embed, critically reflect and classify political statements, the maintenance of these high-quality media channels could be beneficial for both well-informed citizens and well-functioning democracies. A third strategy legislators might consider are investments in data protection and fact checking services. An independent and reliable organization providing a classification of digital uncontrolled and unfiltered spread statements and news might enable citizens to inform themselves about current political processes and allow them to form their own opinion based on trustworthy information services.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Although this dissertation project contributed in several aspects to the field of populist communication research, the studies embedded are not without their limitations. First to compare communications by individual political actors across different media channels, a complicated sampling procedure with individual matching on the micro level was established in *ARTICLES IV-V*, starting with the appearance of political actors on political talk shows and analyzing the news and social media statements of these politicians. This procedure ensured the comparability of communication on all channel types and thus avoided ecological fallacies. This sampling strategy strength at the same time resulted in a skewed sample, as populist actors and especially backbenchers were underrepresented because politicians who do not hold a key position or do not generally receive a large amount of media attention are not invited to be guests on political talk shows. Moreover, social media affine political actors who willingly circumvent traditional news media, might not even accept talk show invitations and focus exclusively on their Facebook or Twitter communication are excluded. This limitation on the actor level is further complemented by a rather limited sample size of included countries, parties, or communication channels. Time periods are another limitation, as only routine time without any national elections were investigated in all five studies. The investigation of election times in which political actors fight even more about the media and citizens' attention to win or maximize votes could provide further insights, as populist communication could be different and even more pronounced during election campaigns. In particular, both debates and discussions on talk shows and social media could be enriched and loaded with more

populist communication elements. A third limitation concerns the restriction on two political issues – labor market and migration – in news media content. This limitation could not only partially explain the higher occurrence of populist communication in newspapers but also challenges comparability with other communication channels. A wider news media sample in terms of political issues or the same restriction of issues across all channels could have prevented that problem. A fourth limitation is the fact that only written statements by politicians were included in the social and news media analysis. Including posted links or retweets, and especially analyzing pictures or videos, would complement the picture of the degree of populist messages and styles across media channels. In particular visual elements of populist communication, such as outfits, gestures and facial expressions or charisma, could be more closely analyzed in a project, including (audio-) visual material. The single analysis of politicians' (direct and indirect) statements must be considered as another limitation. We know little about how these statements are integrated into the news media and if they are neutrally transmitted, negatively evaluated, challenged, or attenuated or even amplified by other media or political actors. Moreover, I did not test the effects of these statements on citizens by analyzing, for example, their reactions in the form of popularity cues on social media or their second-screen behavior by analyzing specific hashtags relating to talk show episodes. I further neglected comment sections and reactions in the news media, which leads to the final limitation of my dissertation: my studies are restricted to content analysis methods. Multi-method research and especially a combination with survey-based methods, such as interviews with journalists, campaign managers, communication strategist or citizens, could widen our understanding of the effects, aims and motives of populist communication by political actors in the media. Overall, the findings represent a specific sample and any generalization must be drawn carefully.

Despite these shortcomings, I am convinced that this dissertation makes an important contribution to the relatively undeveloped field of comparative populist communication research. Hopefully, it will help inform our understanding of the developments and trends in populist communication across news media and political systems, communication channels types, political actors and may provide a point of reference for researchers seeking to investigate additional aspects of populist communication.

This brings me to recommendations for future research endeavors. Let me start with a quote by de Vreese et al. (2018, p. 11): "As populism, for better and worse, is thriving (with

an increase on both the political supply and demand side), research on populism is also likely to thrive". I could not agree more with this quote and believe that populist communication will play a major role in both political and communication science in the future. In the subfield of populist communication in which my dissertation is located, my work deals with the comparative analysis of populist communication by political actors in the media. Within this specific area at least seven future research projects are desirable. First, I highlight the importance of multi-channel studies in a comparative setting. One can only identify specific communication strategies by political actors by comparing their entire communication plan. Especially within populist communication, media channels matter and should be broadly included. In addition to talk shows, news media and social media, studies should include channels that are more in control of political actors and analyze and compare political party broadcasts, campaign posters, party websites, political speeches and press releases. At the same time, media over which political actors have less control, such as TV newscasts, satire programs, late night shows or online news media play a crucial role and should therefore be integrated into future research projects. Additionally, digital media possibilities, such as blogs, search engines or other social media networks like YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat, should be part of future research projects. It would be interesting to investigate, how internet specific phenomenon's like memes, hashtags or shitstorms relate to populist communication, how political actors use them and what effect the have on citizens. Memes for example could be especially important for populist communication, as they allow the criticism of elites in a humorous way and have to potential to go viral. One example would be the wrestling meme showing Trump beating up CNN. Additionally, an investigation of politicians and political parties' YouTube channels could provide interesting insight into the use of populist communication in audio-visual channels that are fully controlled by political actors. Second, the potential of explanation factors on the individual level of actors has not been exhausted. It would be interesting to investigate how, for example, the online affinity of political actors in terms of their multiple and intensive digital media use influences their degree of populist communication. One could expect that the more online affinity a politician has, the more platforms he uses and the wider his digital network, the more familiar he will be with successful online communication strategies and the more he will utilize populism in his communication. Additional socioeconomic variables, such as age, gender and education, could be worth analyzing. Third, populist communication research focuses on either Western

democracies or Latin American countries. I call for studies to go beyond the usual suspects, to go beyond the West and to include political actors from Eastern or Southern Europe, Asia or Africa. A large comparative study in term of the scope of included countries could provide essential insight into how different media and political systems foster or hinder populist communication in the media and compare different modes of operation. A fourth potential research project could implement the comparison of different communication cycles. We know that political communication is different in election vs. routine time periods. It is therefore surprising that populism research always focuses on a single special time period. The comparison of communication practices by political actors within both periods could be extremely fruitful. I would expect that degrees of populist communication vary between these two periods and that populism is especially prevalent during elections. A fifth research gap concerns political issues. In addition to categorizing political issues as populist and non-populist, research should provide a deeper investigation of which political issues are often loaded with populist communication elements. Do other political issues than those theoretically linked to populism have a high affinity with these communication practices, and how do commonly known populism affine issues differ from one another in their degree of populist communication? It would also be interesting to compare different issue agendas and, for example, to investigate whether crises (e.g., migration or financial crises) are a fertile ground for populist communication to flourish. Sixth, the effect and influence that populist communication by political actors has on citizens, journalist or other political actors is essential. This investigation could be performed via content analysis research, by investigating citizens' comments after news articles or their social media reactions (popularity cues) to populist statements. One could also determine how media actors address embedded populist statements more carefully and determine how often Facebook posts or tweets by political actors are implemented or even are the triggers for news media articles. Research in this area could further shed light on the questions of which type, of Facebook and Twitter statements end up in the media and their relation to populism. One could expect that tweets or posts that are successful in terms of likes, shares and comments and receive high attention could be deliberately chosen by media actors for inclusion in their news articles. Because the business models of digital news media have changed and they must increasingly rely on clicks and high consumer traction, it could be lucrative for media actors to incorporate successful social media statements into their news articles in the hope of similar user reactions. Furthermore,

statements that receive many social media reactions might be exactly those that include populist communication messages and styles. As a final proposal, I call for multiple method studies combining content analysis, document analysis, survey and/or experimental data. This multi-method combination would allow for a combined analysis of coherent research questions and would bring populist communication research an important step closer to describe the entire phenomenon. I hope and believe that the findings and contributions of my dissertation will serve as a solid foundation for future research in the field of populist communication.

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Appendix

Personal performance record related to cumulative thesis

Teaching Activities at the IKMZ

Fall semester 2018 and spring semester 2019: research seminar (under graduate level): Populistische Kommunikation im digitalen Zeitalter and supervision of Bachelor theses at Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with S. Blassnig)

Fall semester 2017: lecture (undergraduate level): Grundlagen der Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft I und II at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with F. Esser, B. Fretwurst & S. Blassnig)

Fall semester 2016 and spring semester 2017: research seminar (under graduate level): Erfolgreiche Populisten in ganz Europa: Welche Rolle übernehmen die Medien? and supervision of Bachelor theses at Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with S. Blassnig).

Spring semester 2016: research course (undergraduate level): Social Media in der politischen Kommunikation at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with D. Steppat)

Fall semester 2015 and spring semester 2016: research seminar (under graduate level): Wie viel Social Media braucht die Politik? and supervision of Bachelor theses at Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with D. Steppat)

Spring semester 2015: research course (undergraduate level): Medialisierung der Politik at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich

Fall semester 2014: lecture (undergraduate level): Grundlagen der Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft I und II at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with F. Esser)

Spring semester 2014: lecture (undergraduate level): International Comparative Media Research: An Overview at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with F. Esser)

Fall semester 2013: seminar (graduate level) “Transnationale Nachrichtenlogik?” at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich (co-teaching with F. Esser)

Supervision of several master's and bachelor theses

Contributions at conferences

Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press. ICA Conference, Washington DC, May 24-28 2019

Populism as a Trigger for Reader Comments: Populist News Articles Lead to Populist Audience Reactions. ICA Conference, Washington DC, May 24-28 2019 (presented by S. Blassnig)

Does populist communication make politicians more popular on Facebook and Twitter? A six-country analysis. ICA Conference, Washington DC, May 24-28 2019 (presented by S. Blassnig)

Mehr Likes durch populistische Kommunikation? Eine Analyse von Facebook-Reaktionen im deutschen und österreichischen Wahlkampf 2017. DGPuK Conference, Münster, May 9-11 2019 (presented by A. Staender)

The effect of populist communication on social media popularity indicators: How political leaders use populist key messages on Facebook and Twitter. ECREA Conference, Lugano, November 31-3 2018 (presented by S. Blassnig)

Where populists prefer to spread their messages. An analysis of social media and talk shows in six countries. ICA Conference, Prag, May 24-28 2018

Populism in Online News: How Politicians, Journalists, and Readers Disseminate Populist Messages during Election Times. ICA Conference, Prag, May 24-28 2018 (presented by S. Blassnig)

How Right-Wing Populist Communication Influences Cognitions and Emotions towards Immigrants: Evidence from a Cross-National Panel-Survey. ICA Conference, Prag, May 24-28 2018 (presented by D. Wirz)

Populisten in den Medien. Eine Framinganalyse der AfD und FPÖ in deutschen und österreichischen Qualitäts- und Boulevardmedien. DGPuK's Political Communication Section Interim Conference, Fribourg, February 8-10 2018 (presented by R. Schwab & J. Haslach)

Populistische Krisen-Rhetorik: Wie Emotionalisierung und Dramatisierung von populistischen Inhalten deren Wirkung verstärkt. DGPuK's Political Communication Section Interim Conference, Fribourg, February 8-10 2018 (presented by D. Wirz)

Political Talk Show or Social Media – Which channel benefits the populist message? ECREA's Political Communication Section Interim Conference, Zürich, November 22-23 2017

Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries. ICA Conference, San Diego, June 25-29 2017

Populism in the Press: A Comparative Analysis of Ten Western Democracies. ICA Conference, San Diego, June 25-29 2017 (presented by S. Engesser)

Privatization and Negativity in the British and Swiss Election Campaign 2015. A Question of Professionalization? SGKM Conference, Chur, April 28-29 2017 (presented by M. Baumann & J. Broummana)

Wettbewerb um Aufmerksamkeit im Social Web: eine empirische Untersuchung der Resonanz von Facebook-Beiträgen im Schweizer Wahlkampf 2015. DGPuK Conference, Düsseldorf, March 30-31 2017 (presented by A. Staender)

Populist Communication Strategies in News Media in Four European Democracies. ICA Preconference, Fukuoka, June 9-13 2016

Populismus in der politischen Kommunikation: Erkenntnisse aus Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz. DGPuK Conference, Leipzig, March 30-31 2015 (presented by S. Engesser)

Social Media as Political Instrument. ICA Conference, San Juan Puerto Rico, May 21-25 2015 (presented by S. Engesser)

Populism and the Media forming an Unholy Alliance: An integrative Framework. ICA Conference, Seattle, May 22-25 2014 (co-presented with D. Wirz)

Effects of Repeatedly Presented Attacking Campaigning Poster. ICA Conference, Seattle, May 22-25 2014.

Further Publications

Blassnig, S., Ernst, N., Büchel, F., Engesser, S., & Esser, F. (2018). Populism in Online Election Coverage. *Journalism Studies*, 1–20.

Blassnig, S., Büchel, F., Ernst, N., & Engesser, S. (2018). Populism and Informal Fallacies: An Analysis of Right-Wing Populist Rhetoric in Election Campaigns. *Argumentation*, 1-30.

Blassnig, S., Ernst, N., Büchel, F., & Engesser, S. (2018). Populist Communication in Talk Shows and Social Media: A Comparative Content Analysis in Four Countries. *Studies in Communication - Media (SCM)*, *7*(3), 338-363.

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Staender, A., Ernst, N., Steppat, D. (2019). Was steigert die Facebook-Resonanz? Eine Analyse der Likes, Shares und Comments im Schweizer Wahlkampf 2015. *Studies in Communication | Media*.

Wettstein, M., Esser, F., Büchel, F., Schemer, C., Wirz, D., Schulz, A., Ernst, N., Engesser, S., Müller, P., & Wirth, W. (2018). What Drives Populist Styles? Analyzing Immigration and Labor Market News in 11 Countries. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 1-21.*

Wettstein, M., Esser, F., Schulz, A., Wirz, D. S., & Wirth, W. (2018). News Media as Gatekeepers, Critics, and Initiators of Populist Communication: How Journalists in Ten Countries Deal with the Populist Challenge. *The International Journal of Press/Politics,* 1-20.

Wirth, W., Esser, F., Wettstein, M., Engesser, S., Wirz, D., Schulz, A., Ernst, N. . . . Schemer, C. (2016). The appeal of populist ideas, strategies and styles: A theoretical model and research design for analyzing populist political communication. Zürich: *NCCR Democracy, Working Paper No. 88*, pp. 1-60. Retrieved from http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/publications/workingpaper/wp88

Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., Schulz, A., Müller, P., Schemer, C., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Wirth, W. (2018). The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1-21.

Awards

June 2017: "Best Paper Award" by the International Communications Association for Paper "Populism in the Press: A Comparative Analysis of Ten Western Democracies". (together with Sven Engesser, Florin Büchel & Frank Esser)

February 2018: “Best Paper Award” by the Political Communication Division of the German Communication Association (DGPuK): Populist Crisis Rhetoric: How Emotionalization and Dramatization of Populist Content Amplify its Effects (together with D. Wirz, A. Schulz, M. Wettstein, C. Schemer, P. Müller, & W. Wirth)

Author's own contributions for co-authored publications

ARTICLE I

Title: Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology
Researchers involved: Sven Engesser (SE), Nicole Ernst (NE), Florin Büchel (FB), Frank Esser (FE)

	Limited Contribution	**Substantial Contribution**
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	FE	SE, NE
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	FE	SE
Data Collection	FE	SE
Data Analysis		SE, NE
Writing (original draft preparation)	SE, FE, FB	NE
Writing (review and editing)	NE	SE
Conference presentations		
Visualization	NE	SE

ARTICLE II

Title: Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries
Researchers involved: Nicole Ernst (NE), Sven Engesser (SE) Florin Büchel (FB), Sina Blassnig (SB), Frank Esser (FE); Members of the NCCR Democracy Phase III, Module II (NCCR)

	Limited Contribution	**Substantial Contribution**
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	FE, SE	NE
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)		NE, NCCR
Data Collection		NE, NCCR
Data Analysis		NE
Writing (original draft preparation)	SE, FE, FB, SB	NE
Writing (review and editing)	SE, FE, FB, SB	NE
Conference presentations		NE
Visualization		NE

ARTICLE III

Title: Bipolar Populism? The Use of Anti-Elitism and People-Centrism by Swiss Parties on Social Media

Researchers involved: Nicole Ernst (NE), Sven Engesser (SE), Frank Esser (FE), Members of the NCCR Democracy Phase III, Module II (NCCR)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	FE, SE	NE
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)		NE, NCCR
Data Collection		NE, NCCR
Data Analysis		NE
Writing (original draft preparation)	SE	NE, FE
Writing (review and editing)	SE	NE, FE
Conference presentations		
Visualization		NE

ARTICLE IV

Title: Populists prefer social media over talk shows. An analysis of populist messages and stylistic elements across six countries

Researchers involved: Nicole Ernst (NE), Sina Blassnig (SB), Sven Engesser (SE), Florin Büchel (FB), Frank Esser (FE), Members of the NCCR Democracy Phase III, Module II (NCCR)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	FE, FB, SB	NE
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)		NE, NCCR
Data Collection		NE, NCCR
Data Analysis		NE
Writing (original draft preparation)	SE, FE, SB	NE
Writing (review and editing)	SE, SB	NE, FE
Conference presentations		NE
Visualization		NE

ARTICLE V

Title: Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press

Researchers involved: Nicole Ernst (NE), Frank Esser (FE), Sina Blassnig (SB), Sven Engesser (SE), Members of the NCCR Democracy Phase III, Module II (NCCR)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	SB, SE	NE, FE
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)		NE, NCCR
Data Collection		NE, NCCR
Data Analysis		NE
Writing (original draft preparation)	SE, SB	NE, FE
Writing (review and editing)	SE	NE, FE, SB
Conference presentations		NE
Visualization		NE

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Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass die Dissertation von mir selbst ohne unerlaubte Beihilfe verfasst worden ist und diese Dissertation noch an keiner anderen Fakultät eingereicht wurde.

Ort und Datum: Zürich, 2019

Unterschrift: N. Hermann-Sch.

Copies of individual publications of cumulative thesis

ARTICLE I

Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology

ABSTRACT

Populism is a relevant but contested concept in political communication research. It has been well-researched in political manifestos and the mass media. The present study focuses on another part of the hybrid media system and explores how politicians in four countries (AT, CH, IT, UK) use Facebook and Twitter for populist purposes. Five key elements of populism are derived from the literature: emphasizing the sovereignty of the people, advocating for the people, attacking the elite, ostracizing others, and invoking the 'heartland'. A qualitative text analysis reveals that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form on social media. Populist statements can be found across countries, parties, and politicians' status levels. While a broad range of politicians advocate for the people, attacks on the economic elite are preferred by left-wing populists. Attacks on the media elite and ostracism of others, however, are predominantly conducted by right-wing speakers. Overall, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of populism on social media. It shows that social media give the populist actors the freedom to articulate their ideology and spread their messages. The paper also contributes to a refined conceptualization and measurement of populism in future studies.

Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Büchel, F., & Esser, F. (2017) Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication & Society 20*(8), 1109-1126.

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Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology

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Abstract

Populism is a relevant but contested concept in political communication research. It has been well-researched in political manifestos and the mass media. The present study focuses on another part of the hybrid media system and explores how politicians in four countries (AT, CH, IT, UK) use Facebook and Twitter for populist purposes. Five key elements of populism are derived from the literature: emphasizing the sovereignty of the people, advocating for the people, attacking the elite, ostracizing others, and invoking the "heartland". A qualitative text analysis reveals that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form on social media. Populist statements can be found across countries, parties, and politicians' status levels. While a broad range of politicians advocates for the people, attacks on the economic elite are preferred by left-wing populists. Attacks on the media elite and ostracism of others, however, are predominantly conducted by right-wing speakers. Overall, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of populism on social media. It shows that social media give the populist actors the freedom to uncontestedly articulate their ideology and spread their messages. The paper also contributes to a refined conceptualization and measurement of populism in future studies.

Keywords: populism, social media, politics, ideology, qualitative text analysis

Almost half a century ago, Ionescu and Gellner (1969) perceived populism as a "spectre haunting the world" (p. 1) implicating something obscure, unnatural, and terrifying. In line with this negative characterization, populism, at least in Western Europe, was initially understood as a pathological form of democracy (Betz, 1994). Ten years ago, however, Mudde (2004) triggered a shift of perception by arguing that populism was not anomalous but had become "mainstream in the politics of Western democracies" (p. 542). Consequently, he coined the notion of a "populist zeitgeist" (p. 542).

The spread of this 'spirit of the time' could be witnessed through the results of the European Election in 2014 when right-wing parties such as the French National Front, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and the Danish People's Party accumulated the highest share of voters in their respective countries. Simultaneously, left-wing populist parties such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have also been very successful.

Outside of Europe, there has been a notable revival of left-wing populism in Latin America (Hawkins, 2010). With the emergence of the Tea Party and the Occupy movement, the public debate about populism flared up again in the US as well (Agarwal et al. 2014; Kumar, 2011). But regardless of whether we speak of populism as disturbing ghost ('spectre') or popular spirit of the time ('zeitgeist') it retains its intangible nature and is hard to grasp by conceptual and empirical means (Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000).

Populism in the media has been discussed theoretically (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008, 2014) and has been empirically analyzed in various communication channels, such as party and election manifestos (Rooduijn et al., 2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011), political speeches (Cranmer, 2011; Hawkins, 2010), the press (Akkerman, 2011; Bos et al., 2011; Herkman, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014), political party broadcasts (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), TV and radio newscasts (Bos, et al., 2011) and political talk shows (Cranmer, 2011).

However, to draw a complete picture of the "hybrid media system" it is crucial to take social media into account as well (Chadwick, 2013; Chadwick et al. 2016). While the mass media adhere to professional norms and news values, social media serve as *direct linkage* to the people and allow the populists to circumvent the journalistic gatekeepers. In this way, social media provide the populists with the freedom to uncontestedly articulate their ideology and spread their messages.

Numerous scholars have analyzed politicians' use of Facebook and Twitter but they either have ignored the concept of populism or alluded to it only briefly (exceptions: Bartlett,

2014; Gerbaudo, 2014; Groshek & Engelbert, 2013).

In terms of research design, most studies on populism have focused on single countries (exceptions: Akkerman, 2011; Rooduijn, 2014, Herkman, 2015). Scholars have also mainly followed a quantitative approach (exception: Hawkins, 2010), some of them even by drawing on 'big data' and computer-based analyses (e.g. Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). This is meritorious but also bears inherent problems, such as a potential lack of contextualization or overestimation of accuracy (boyd & Crawford, 2012). Some authors, for instance, counted mere references to 'the people' as indications of populism (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Others did not clearly differentiate populism that advocates for the people and populism that attacks elites (e.g. Cranmer, 2011; Rooduijn, 2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011).

The present paper aims at narrowing this research gap by pursuing the question how populism manifests itself in social media. In order to identify cross-national patterns, the study includes four European countries that have strong populist parties but different types of media systems (Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and UK). It employs a qualitative text analysis of typical Facebook and Twitter posts (for a similar 'small data' approach see: Freelon & Karpf, 2015; Stephansen & Couldry, 2014). Besides exploring social media as a public stage for populist actors, the paper provides deeper insights into the definitional elements and empirical types of populism which may help refining the methodological instruments (e.g. search strings and codebooks) for future studies on the subject.

Defining and Conceptualizing Populism

One of the first attempts to conceive populism as a uniform phenomenon dates back to Shils (1956). Although populism has been part of the academic debate since then, it is still a contested concept and has been described as "notoriously vague term" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3).

The main reason why there is no universal definition of populism is the fact that it manifests itself differently depending on the contextual conditions (Priester, 2007). For instance, the cases of agrarian populism in the aftermath of the American Civil War, populism in Latin America or the Narodnik movement in Russia are very different from the relatively new populist movements and parties in contemporary Western democracies. Therefore, it is crucial to delimit the conceptual scope of this study, which is, the current political and media realities of Europe. Yet, even within these boundaries, populism can take on many forms and

facets. In order to include all these manifestations we argue that populism can be defined as a "set of ideas" (Hawkins, 2009, p. 1045; Priester, 2012, p. 1; Rooduijn, 2014, p. 3).

One well-established definition of populism was introduced by Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) who drew on Mudde (2004, p. 543). They conceive populism as

> ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous *people* against a set of *elites* and dangerous *'others'* who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the *sovereign* people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice [italics added].

According to this definitions, populism can be understood as a 'thin' (less elaborate) ideology that gives protagonists the flexibility of enriching it with 'full' (more substantive) ideologies such as socialism, nationalism, or liberalism (Kriesi, 2014, p. 369; Mudde, 2004, p. 544). The core of the populist base-line ideology consists of four key elements: popular sovereignty, pure people, corrupt elite, and dangerous others. An additional element which is not mentioned in the above definition but which is also crucial for the understanding of populism is the glorification of the *heartland*, an "idealized conception of the community" (Taggart, 2004, p. 274) or "retrospective utopia" (Priester, 2012, p. 2).

We argue that a politician who uses these five ideological key elements engages in an illocutionary act of populism and, in this way, *becomes* a populist actor. In concrete terms, populist communication manifests itself by emphasizing the sovereignty to the people, advocating for the people, attacking elites, ostracizing others, and invoking the heartland.

Emphasizing the Sovereignty of the People

First of all, the populist ideology is centered on the people's will and the absolute sovereignty of the people (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004; Shils, 1956). It is this demand for unrestricted popular power that distinguishes populist democracy from its constitutional and liberal counterparts (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Dahl, 1956).

Following the populist argument, the elites are accused of having deprived the people of this right, rendering sovereignty the central subject of all subsequent disputes. The populists consider themselves the only ones able to restore the sovereignty of the people by replacing the elite and all other representative and intermediary institutions (p. 408).

Advocating for the People

Another key element of populism is advocacy for the people (Taggart, 2000, p. 91).

Usually, the people is characterized as a homogeneous (e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008) or monolithic group (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) forming a social unity or community (e.g. Jansen, 2011). The people is supposed to be equipped with a catalogue of virtues (e.g. Taggart, 2000) and described as inherently pure, good, and paramount (e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). It is also been bestowed with the wisdom of the common man (Taggart, 2000). Populist actors try to maintain a close relation to the people. They regard the people's needs and demands as inviolable, and they place it above everything else in society.

Attacking the Elites

The people are opposed to what is frequently subsumed under the label of "the elite" (Mudde 2004, p. 543). In fact, the elite's very identity is based on this antagonism to the people, on being the people's "enemy" (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 5) or even "nemesis" (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). The elite is accused of betraying the people and of having an unjustified control over its rights, well-being, and progress (Jansen, 2011, p. 84). By abusing its power the elites have occupied, distorted, and exploited democracy (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 4; Betz & Johnson, 2004, p. 313).

Therefore, the elite is thoroughly furnished with negative attributes: "corrupt" and "exploitative" (e. g. Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 4), "selfish" and "arrogant" (Rooduijn 2014, p. 6), or "unaccountable" and "incompetent" (Mény & Surel, 2002, p. 9). As the populist actor is eager to protect or restore the people's sovereignty she or he maintains a negative relation to the respective elite. The populist thus attacks, accuses, or blames the elite for the malfunctions and grievances of democracy.

Ostracizing Others

Besides the elite, the "dangerous others" (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; p. 3; Rooduijn 2013, p. 7) are also contrasted to the people. Whereas the elite is considered as danger from above (vertical dimension), the others are perceived as a threat from outside or within the people (horizontal dimension) (Jagers & Walgrave 2007, p. 324). Accordingly, the others are not regarded as part of the elite but as unjustly favored by the elite or even as its partner in conspiracy against the people.

Various population segments can be the target of populist resentment, such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, religious groups, criminals, etc. (Betz & Johnson 2004, p. 313; Rooduijn 2014, p. 7; Abts & Rummens 2007, p. 418). In any case, they are regarded as "a threat to and a burden on society" (Jagers & Walgrave 2007, p. 324).

Invoking the Heartland

Populist actors may also invoke a longing for the so-called heartland. Taggart (2004) introduced this term as "idealized conception of the community" (p. 274). This territory of the imagination differs from ideal societies or utopias in two aspects: First, it is not directed at the future but at the past in an "attempt to construct what has been lost by the present" (Taggart, 2000, p. 95). Second, it is not based on rational thoughts or historical facts but deeply-rooted emotions that may "not be necessarily either rationalized or rationalizable" (p. 95). Populists invoke the image of a virtual location which is occupied by the people, represents the "core of the community" and excludes the "marginal or the extreme" (p. 96).

Priester (2012) provides "Middle America" (see also Taggart, 2000, p. 97) or "La France Profonde" as typical examples for the heartland. Popular icons of the heartland are the Boston Tea Party in the US, Guy Fawkes in the UK, Jeanne D'Arc in France, and Wilhelm Tell in Switzerland. In Germany, probably due to its negative and disrupted past, populist actors have faced difficulties to successfully invoke the heartland.

Populism and Social Media

A theoretical relation between populism and online communication was already established early in the history of the Internet (Bimber, 1998). Some scholars bestowed the Internet with the potential to "restructure political power in a populist direction" (p. 137) and to promote unmediated communication between politicians and citizens (p. 137).

Among the politicians, the populists have been particularly interested in a close connection to the people (Canovan, 2002; p. 34; Krämer, 2014; p. 45; Kriesi, 2014, p. 363; Taggart, 2002, p. 67). As self-perceived advocates and mouthpieces of the people they require "direct, unmediated access to the people's grievances" (Kriesi, 2014, p. 363). Canovan (2002) also identified a demand for a "short-cut that bypasses philosophical disputes and institutional niceties" (p. 34). While all media establish a connection to the people, social media provide the populists with a much more direct linkage. Bartlett (2014) also adds that "the short acerbic nature of populist messages works well in this medium" (p. 94).

These pragmatic reasons for the use of social media by populist actors can be underscored by further theoretical considerations. In light of recent developments in political communication, Chadwick (2013) diagnosed a hybrid media system where "older and newer media logics" (p. 207) compete and complement each other. Building upon this idea of hybridity, Klinger and Svensson (2015, 2016) distinguished the mass media logic of

professional news outlets from the network logic of social media. While the former is based on professional gatekeepers and a relatively passive audience, the latter evolves from "like-minded" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1248) peer networks. In terms of content production, the mass media logic adheres to professional norms and news values and the network media logic follows the ideal of "attention maximation" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 29).

Against this backdrop, it makes sense that populist actors pursue a hybrid communication strategy. On the one hand, they may address the mass media in order to distribute official statements to larger audiences. These messages have to comply to the mass media logic and may be modified by the journalist accordingly (Herkman, 2015). Besides, the journalists of the upmarket press are presumed to act as "paladins" of the elites and to attenuate or to criticize populist statements in their articles (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008). Therefore, the populists may turn towards social media in order to circumvent the media institutions and journalistic gatekeepers. In this way, the populist messages do not have to follow the news values and are frequently more personal and sensationalistic in nature. While the first aspect of the hybrid communication strategy has been thoroughly investigated (e.g. Akkerman, 2011; Bos et al., 2011; Herkman, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014) this study sheds light on the second aspect of the strategy.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) contrasted a logic of collective action associated with formal organizations and collective identity to a logic of connective action involving personalized and inclusive content, such as "personal action frames" (p. 744), and social media as means of distribution. Popular examples for personal action frames are the 'Put People First' campaign in the London 2009 protests or the slogan 'we are the 99 percent' of the Occupy movement (p. 744). These frames are highly inclusive and align people with different personal backgrounds and motives under a common cause (p. 744). Personal action frames are not so much based on established social groups, memberships, and substantive ideologies but rather on "flexible political identifications" (p. 744). This fits very well to with the "thin" (Kriesi, 2014, p. 369; Mudde, 2004, p. 544) ideology and "chameleonic" (Taggart, 2004, p. 275) nature of populism. Therefore, we assume that populism on social media may manifest itself in the shape of a personal action frame.

Method

To investigate whether and how populism manifests itself on social media we conducted a qualitative text analysis of typical Facebook and Twitter posts.

Table 1. Sample of political actors

Country	Party	Sample criterion	Name	Position
AT	SPÖ	Status	Laura Rudas	Chairman
AT	SPÖ	Status	Werner Faymann	Party leader
AT	SPÖ	Activity	Franz Voves	Head of regional government
AT	SPÖ	Activity	Hannes Swoboda	Group leader in EP
AT	SPÖ	Activity	Peter Kaiser	Regional party leader
AT	FPÖ	Status	HC Strache	Party leader
AT	FPÖ	Status	Herbert Kickl	General secretary
AT	FPÖ	Activity	Andreas Mölzer	MP
AT	FPÖ	Activity	Karl Schnell	Regional party leader
AT	FPÖ	Activity	Udo Landbauer	Youth party leader
CH	SP	Status	Christian Levrat	Party leader
CH	SP	Status	Flavia Wasserfallen	General secretary
CH	SP	Activity	Cedric Wermuth	MP
CH	SP	Activity	Jacqueline Badran	MP
CH	SP	Activity	Pascale Bruderer Wyss	MP
CH	SVP	Status	Martin Baltisser	General secretary
CH	SVP	Status	Toni Brunner	Party leader
CH	SVP	Activity	Christoph Mörgeli	MP
CH	SVP	Activity	Lukas Reimann	MP
CH	SVP	Activity	Natalie Rickli	MP
GB	Conserv.	Status	David Cameron	Party leader
GB	Conserv.	Status	Grant Shapps	Chairman
GB	Conserv.	Activity	Boris Johnson	Mayor of London
GB	Conserv.	Activity	George Osborne	Chancellor of the Exchequer
GB	Conserv.	Activity	Jeremy Hunt	Health Secretary
GB	Labour	Status	Ed Miliband	Party leader
GB	Labour	Status	Iain McNicol	General secretary
GB	Labour	Activity	Andy Burnham	Shadow Health Secretary
GB	Labour	Activity	Douglas Alexander	Shadow Foreign Secretary
GB	Labour	Activity	Yvette Cooper	Shadow Home Secretary
GB	UKIP	Status	Jonathan Arnott	Chairman
GB	UKIP	Status	Nigel Farage	Party leader
GB	UKIP	Activity	Paul Nuttall	Deputy leader
GB	UKIP	Activity	Steven Woolfe	National Executive Committee
GB	UKIP	Activity	Suzanne Evans	City councillor
IT	M5S	Status	Beppe Grillo	President
IT	M5S	Status	Enrico Maria Nadasi	Secretary
IT	M5S	Activity	Alessandro Di Battista	MEP
IT	M5S	Activity	Federico Pizzarotti	Mayor of Parma
IT	M5S	Activity	Luigi Di Maio	Vice President of the Chamber of Deputies
IT	PD	Status	Guglielmo Epifani	Party leader
IT	PD	Status	Pier Luigi Bersani	Party leader

IT	PD	Activity	Cécile Kyenge	Minister of Integration
IT	PD	Activity	Rosy Bindi	Former Minister of Health
IT	PD	Activity	Walter Veltroni	Former party leader
IT	PdL	Status	Angelino Alfano	Secretary
IT	PdL	Status	Silvio Berlusconi	President
IT	PdL	Activity	Daniele Capezzone	MP
IT	PdL	Activity	Denis Verdini	MP
IT	PdL	Activity	Maurizio Gasparri	MP

To increase the variance and to identify cross-national patterns we took four West European countries into account: Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and UK. On the one hand, these countries share strong typical populist parties (Aalberg et al. 2016; Kriesi & Pappas, 2015), such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy and the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP). On the other hand, the countries also represent different types of media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) with Austria and Switzerland belonging to the Democratic-Corporatist model, Italy as part of the Polarized-Pluralist model and the UK being associated to the Liberal model.

We included the above mentioned populist parties (where we assume a pronounced and consistent motivation to use the five constituents outlined above) but also the dominant social democrat and conservative parties (that serve as a control group to check whether we see a spill-over to mainstream political actors). Within each party, two different groups of politicians were investigated: those occupying top positions in the party hierarchy (leaders, chairmen, and secretaries) and those with very active communication behavior and media presence such as vocal backbenchers and regular talk show guests (for an overview see: Table). We examined all official Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of the selected politicians during a period of six months (1 January – 30 June 2013).

For the data analysis, we proceeded in three steps: First, we used the five ideological key elements identified in the theoretical part of this paper as heuristic categories and scanned the collected Facebook and Twitter content for all posts that fell into at least one of these categories. Second, we selected those posts which we regarded as typical cases for their respective category (Daniel, 2012, p. 90). Third, we subjected these posts to a hermeneutic text analysis (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 16) in order to illustrate how politicians utilized, modified, differentiated, and combined the five key ideological elements.

Findings

Emphasizing the Sovereignty of the People

The act of emphasizing the sovereignty of the people can assume two different shapes: a more abstract and a more concrete one. In the former variant, the speaker refers to the people as the theoretical origin of power in democracy as it is illustrated in the following post:

> «At the Congress of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann reminds us: The law emanates from the people, and not – as some believe – from gold. [Original: Bundeskanzler Werner Faymann erinnert beim ÖGB-Bundeskongress daran: Das Recht geht vom Volk aus und nicht wie manche glauben: Das Recht geht vom Gold aus.]» (Laura Rudas, Social Democratic Party of Austria, 18 June 2013, Facebook)

In this case, the speaker also stresses the fact that the populist (in this case not the speaker herself but the leader of her party) has not forgotten the people's right to sovereignty, in contrast to "some" others who think that "money" was the source of power instead. This undefined "some" may also be regarded as an implicit attack on the elites.

In the latter variant, the speaker demands more power for the people and he explicitly promotes the implementation of direct democratic elements, such as popular votes:

> «Referendum Bill passes first Commons stage, bringing us one step closer to giving the British people a say on Europe» (David Cameron, British Conservative Party, 5 July 2013, Twitter)

It is an interesting finding that both of the above posts originate from representatives of mainstream parties – one social democratic and one conservative – and they were sent by (or at least relate to) the party leaders and heads of government. This proves that not only the typical populist actors emphasize the sovereignty of the people.

Advocating for the People

The act of advocacy is usually performed by stressing that the populist is a true representative of the people, as it is done in the following two posts:

> «I am putting Labour back where it should always have been, on the side of working people» (Ed Miliband, British Labour Party, 13 February 2013, Twitter)

> «This is why UKIP are the party for the hard working British people» (Nigel Farage, UKIP, 14 May 2013, Twitter)

In these cases, the people are characterized as “working” or even “hard working”. This feature targets the working class without excluding other segments of the population. It bears resemblance to a “personal action frame” such as the ‘Put People First’ campaign in the London 2009 protests (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 744) which is highly inclusive and allows a broad range of recipients to identify themselves with. In the cases at hand, both the social democratic Labour Party and the right-wing UKIP assert an almost identical claim. This demonstrates the versatility and thin nature of the populist ideology which can be used in different contexts and charged with more substantive ideologies.

Sometimes, the speaker also uses a figure of speech (a special form of synecdoche known as “the whole for a part”) to replace “people” with the name of their home country, such as “Austria” in the following post:

> «With us, Austria comes first! [Original: Mit UNS kommt Österreich zuerst!]» (Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 15 May 2013, Twitter)

Superficially, this may create the impression as if the populist stands up for the entire country and all its inhabitants. In fact, “Austria” does only refer to the people in the populist understanding of the word, excluding the elites and any potential ‘others’. Nonetheless, the slogan can be regarded as personal action frame and leaves it to the individual social media user to decide if he or she can identify with the populist concept of the country.

Attacking the Elites

When a speaker attacks the elite, she or he usually targets a particularly privileged or powerful segment of the population. However, the elite may be portrayed as occupying a distinct subsystem of society – such as politics, economics, law or media.

Political elite. The most obvious type of elite is the political elite as it is attacked in the following two posts: In the first one, the speaker refers to the political elite in a more general sense as a separated “political class”. This already has a pejorative undertone to it, even more so in the German-language original version of the post, where the speaker specifically uses the French word “classe politique” to linguistically underline the social elevation of the elite. The political elite is accused of having organized a “coup” (against the people) and the populist party expresses its determination to “fight” it (and to restore popular sovereignty).

> «The SVP fights against coup of the political class. [Original: SVP kämpft gegen Staatsstreich der Classe politique.]» (Lukas Reimann, Swiss People’s Party, 15 March

2013, Twitter)

In the second post, the political elite assumes a more concrete shape and is embodied by a series of political parties, namely almost all relevant national parties except for the populist party led by the speaker himself. These parties are accused of corruption and greed and of living not up to their own standards of transparency:

> «Look at the crystal palace of corruption and greed in which the self-proclaimed clean parties SPÖ, ÖVP, BZÖ, Stronach and Greens reside… [Original: In welchem Glaspalast von Korruption und Geldgier die selbsternannten Sauberparteien SPÖ, ÖVP, BZÖ, Stronach und Grüne sitzen…]» (Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 29 August 2013, Twitter)

Economic elites. Another option for the populist actor is an attack on the economic elite as conducted in the following two posts:

> «Those who managed to reach the top in recent years haven't been the best for a long time but rather the most greedy, most corrupt, and most shameless [Original: Jene, die es in den letzten Jahren bis nach ganz oben geschafft haben, sind schon lange nicht mehr die Besten, sondern die Gierigsten, Korrumpiertesten, Schamlosesten.]» (Cédric Wermuth, Social Democratic Party of Switzerland, 8 March 2013, Facebook)

As already demonstrated for the political elite, the economic elite can be referred to in a general sense, here as those at the "top". And as the political elite in the previous post, the economic elite is here described as being "corrupt" and "greedy".

Beside the general reference, it is also possible to target the economic elite more specifically. In the following post, the speaker refers to the participants of the World Economic Forum's annual winter meeting in Davos. The speaker argues that this elite does not care for the people and that it does not assume its social responsibility to provide them with jobs. The people are characterized as "from the street". Although this is actually an ambiguous formulation, it means rather "common" or "ordinary" than "homeless".

> «Some report the elite (in Davos) is afraid of the street. But if they provided the people from the street with jobs they would not need to be afraid of them [Original: Manche berichten, die Elite (in Davos) habe Angst vor der Strasse. Aber sie sollte durch eine andere Wirtschaftspolitik die Menschen von der Strasse in die Arbeit bringen, dann

bräuchten sie keine Angst vor ihnen haben.]» (Hannes Swoboda, Social Democratic Party of Austria, 24 January 2013, Facebook)

It is no coincidence that both of the above attacks on the economic elites have been posted by Social Democrats because it is highly compatible with their left-wing ideology including the critique of capitalism, and social equality.

Legal elites. Beside the classic political and economic elites, populist actors also attack legal elites. In the following post, the speaker refers to the Swiss federal court's decision to verify whether popular initiatives are in line with international law before admitting them to the popular vote. Questioning the sovereignty of the people as highest authority is regarded as a "coup" and "dictatorship of judges":

«Federal court positions international law above Federal Constitution. This is unconstitutional. A coup, a dictatorship of judges. [Original: Bundesgericht stellt Völkerrecht über Bundesverfassung. Das ist verfassungswidrig. Ein Staatsstreich, eine Richterdiktatur.]» (Christoph Mörgeli, Swiss People's Party, 8 February 2013, Twitter)

Supranational elites. The tension between national sovereignty and international institutions that was already implicitly touched upon in the previous post is pushed even more to the fore when supranational elites are attacked. In the following post the speaker accuses the EU officials in Brussels of earning inappropriate high salaries and squandering the people's taxes. In this way, the EU officials are also located at the point of intersection between the political and the economic elite:

«Unbelievable how taxpayer's money is handled in Brussels. The EU officials earn top salaries and… [Original: Unglaublich, wie in Brüssel mit dem Geld der Steuerzahler umgegangen wird. Die EU-Beamten verdienen Traumgagen und...]» (Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 27 August 2013)

Media elites. Another act of populism is attacking the media elites. Particularly the national public service broadcasters are regarded as being part of the establishment by populist actors. In the following post, the speaker calls the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation "Red Radio" and accuses it of being heavily slanted towards the political left:

«Austrians know that the Red Radio is far from being objective. [Original: Die Österreicher wissen, dass der Rotfunk von Objektivität weit entfernt ist.]»

(Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 25 August 2013, Twitter)

A public service broadcaster is also the target of the following post, when the speaker demands the abolition of the reduced pension age for the managers of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. These managers assume the role of a hybrid between the economic and media elite. They are explicitly contrasted to the "normal Swiss workers":

> «What applies to the normal Swiss worker should also apply to the bosses of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation: Pension age of 65 instead of 62 [Original: Was für den normalen Schweizer Büezer gilt, soll auch für die SRG-Chefs gelten: Rentenalter 65 statt 62.] » (Natalie Rickli, Swiss People's Party, 14 April 2013, Twitter)

In summary, many posts that feature attacks on the elite are characterized by a relatively harsh tone. They include attributions of "corruption" and "greed", as well as a special pejorative terminology (such as "coup", "political class", and "red radio"). It is unlikely that, in the mass media, the journalists would allow the populists to articulate themselves in this way without any critical intervention or further contextualization. This terminology, however, goes together well with the network logic of social media by increasing the attention of the followers and the potential virality of the posts.

Ostracizing Others

A typical case of ostracism is provided by the following post, where the speaker lists a series of groups that the populist actors do not regard as part of the people and intend to deport. These groups all share a foreign origin or religion:

> «HC Strache and the FPÖ will send criminal foreigners, fraudulent asylum seekers, extremist islamists and preachers of hate back to their home country! [Original: „HC Strache und die FPÖ werden kriminelle Ausländer, Asylbetrüger und extremistische Islamisten und Hassprediger in ihr Heimatland zurück schicken!]» (Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 19 May 2013, Twitter)

However, it is worth noting that the speaker seems to have carefully ensured that all groups are characterized as criminal offenders or at least as operating in the gray area of legality. This may have been a strategy to avoid being charged with sedition.

Besides this very explicit case of ostracism, there are also much more implicit examples. Although the following post is formulated in a positive way it also entails its respective

negation meaning that there is no citizenship for non-integrated foreigners. This is a very subtle way of transporting populist ideology from one like-minded person to another without making oneself vulnerable to others:

> «Swiss citizenship only for well-integrated foreigners [Original: Schweizer Bürgerrecht nur für gut integrierte Ausländer.]» (Lukas Reimann, Swiss People's Party, 5 March 2013, Twitter)

An even more sophisticated form of ostracism is established by accusing others of ostracism. In the following post, the speaker argues that the 'others' insulted the populist actors as "right-wing or extremist" but not without calling them "communist do-gooders" himself. Here, the discriminatory feature of the 'others' is not foreign origin or religion but political attitude:

> «Everything the left-wing and communist do-gooders don't like is insulted as right-wing or extremist [Original: Alles was den linken und kommunistischen Gutmenschen nicht passt, wird als rechts und extremistisch verunglimpft.]» (Heinz-Christian Strache, Freedom Party of Austria, 21 May 2013, Twitter)

Remarkably, the above presented acts of ostracizing others were performed by right-wing populist actors, which is in line with their ideology that partly leans towards nationalism.

Analogous to the attacks on the elite, the posts that ostracize others frequently include pejorative terms (such as "fraudulent" and "do-gooders"). Again, it appears unlikely that these messages would pass the gates of the mass media logic uncontestedly. However, the posts comply to the network media logic of "attention maximation" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 29) and may exert suggestive power on like-minded social media users.

Invoking the Heartland

The heartland can be invoked with a single key word. In the following post, the speaker refers to the year "1291", in which the Federal Charter and founding document of the Swiss Confederacy was issued. The Confederacy was initially founded to secure free trade, peace and independence for the communities of the Central Alps. Therefore, 1291 is widely regarded as a symbol for the autonomy and prosperity of Switzerland and the speaker makes use of this symbolic power. He implied that the achievements of 1291 were at risk because the Swiss government had decided to accept the European Court of Justice as final authority. As a countermeasure he suggested a popular vote to restore the sovereignty of the people:

«Unbelievable! What was 1291 actually good for? The Federal Council capitulates and wants foreign EU judges. Now we need a popular vote! [Original: Unfassbar. Wozu war eigentlich 1291 gut? Bundesrat kapituliert und will fremde EU-Richter. Jetzt aber Volkswahl!]» (Christoph Mörgeli, Swiss People's Party, 17 May 2013, Twitter)

The heartland can also be invoked by the mentioning of a person. The soldier Guy Fawkes was a central figure behind the so-called Gunpowder Plot in 1605, an attempt to blow up the British Parliament and kill King James due to the persecution of Catholicism under his rule. Throughout the centuries, Fawkes has served as icon and object of projection for various social movements. He has become an important part of British popular culture and the masks of both Anonymous and Occupy Wall Street were modelled after his face. When the UKIP welcomed Philip Fawkes, a distant descendant of Guy Fawkes, as a new member party leader Nigel Farage drew on this extensive cultural background:

«Was Guy Fawkes the last man to enter Westminster with honest intentions? UKIP has its own Mr Fawkes, sharing the same lineage» (Nigel Farage, UKIP, 26 January 2013, Facebook)

Combining the People and the Elite

Whereas the previous posts each included a single ideological key element the following examples combine the people and the elite. The next post can be regarded as a cautious reminder that the political elite should represent the people:

«In recent weeks the financial sector has concertedly attacked the implementation of the tax. Politicians need to defy the lobbyists and demonstrate that they take sides with the citizens. [Original: In den vergangenen Wochen hat es einen konzertierten Angriff des Finanzsektors gegen die Einführung der Steuer gegeben. Politiker müssen sich diesen Lobbyisten widersetzen und beweisen, dass sie auf der Seite der Bürgerinnen und Bürger stehen.]» (Werner Faymann, Social Democratic Party of Austria, 19 June 2013, Facebook)

In the following two posts the speakers argue more aggressively that the political elite – be it the government or the mainstream parties – already does not represent the people anymore. Both speakers use a democratic-theoretical vocabulary referring to the "people's will" and the "principles of the constitution". Accordingly, this can be regarded as a

combination of popular sovereignty and attacks on the elite:

> «The people's will truly does not count for the Federal Council. [Original: Der Volkswillen zählt beim Bundesrat wirklich nicht mehr.]» (Natalie Rickli, Swiss People's Party, 26 June 2013, Facebook)

> «Austrian interests do not count anymore. SPÖ und ÖVP support this and have jettisoned the principles of our constitution by agreeing to the European Stability Mechanism and the Fiscal Stability Treaty [Original: Österreichische Interessen zählen nichts mehr. SPÖ und ÖVP unterstützen diesen Weg und haben mit dem Europäischen Stabilitätsmechanismus und dem Fiskalpakt die Grundsätze unserer Verfassung über Bord geworfen.]» (Karl Schnell, Freedom Party of Austria, 29 April 2013, Facebook)

The next speaker omits the democratic-theoretical argument and introduces the populist actor instead. It starts with the argument that the populist movement is the true representative of the people. In this case, this includes the classic statement that the populist is neither left-wing nor right-wing but transcends all traditional political alignments. This is contrasted to the political elite which is characterized as uniform and harmful. Thus, we can regard this post as combination of advocacy for the people and attacks on the elite:

> «The Five Star Movement is not left-wing (nor right-wing). It is a movement of Italians. You don't want to cooperate with those who ruined Italy. We don't want to have them onboard. PD, SEL or PDL, one or another, for me they are all the same [Original: Il Movimento 5 Stelle non è di sinistra (e neppure di destra). E' un movimento di italiani. Non vuole fare 'percorsi insieme' a chi ha rovinato l'Italia. Pesi a bordo non ne vogliamo. Pd, Sel o Pdl, questi o quelli, per me pari sono.]» (Beppe Grillo, Five Star Movement, 19 May 2013, Facebook)

The final post spans the full circle from popular sovereignty over attacks on the elite to advocacy for the people. It can be regarded as the most complete manifestation of populist ideology on social media we have encountered. This is even more remarkable when considering that the post was condensed in less than 140 characters as required by Twitter:

> «In these 20 years have we have fought for the sovereignty of the people and for preventing that it was mortified by the games of the palace [Original: In questi 20 anni abbiamo combattuto per primato sovranità popolare e per impedire che fosse

mortificato dai giochi di palazzo.]» (Angelino Alfano, People of Freedom, 3 June 2013, Twitter)

The two final posts combine personal action frames (e.g. “movement of Italians” and “sovereignty of the people”) with colorful language (e.g. “ruined” and “mortified”). While the first element contributes to the inclusiveness of the post, the second one aims at raising emotions and increasing attention. In this way, the speakers use the network media logic to effectively spread their messages.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is a major finding of this study that populism manifested itself in a *fragmented* form on social media. Even though all five key definitional elements appeared across the posts and tweets under analysis, the elements were generally isolated from each other or clustered in pairs, at the most. We admit that this may have been partly due to Twitter’s restrictions to 140 characters but it also applied to Facebook. Therefore, the fragmentation could be an empirical expression of populism’s “thin” nature (Kriesi, 2014, p. 369; Mudde, 2004, p. 544) and “inherent incompleteness” (Taggart, 2004, p. 275).

We can offer three potential reasons why politicians may spread populist ideology in a fragmented form: First, the speakers may aim at reducing the ideology’s low level of complexity even further in order to make it more comprehensible for the social media users. Second, the politicians may keep the populist ideology ambiguous and malleable in order to benefit from the inclusiveness of a “personal action frame” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 744). This means that the individual social media user can complement fragments of populist ideology with various additional ideological elements and tailor it to her or his specific political attitudes. Third, fragments of populism may, more easily than a full-fledged ideology, travel below the radar of political opponents and critical observers from one like-minded person to another. These three aims can be easier reached on social media without the interference of the mass media’s journalistic gatekeepers and filter mechanisms.

We also found populist elements across countries, parties, and politicians’ status levels. These elements were included in posts from Austria, Italy, Switzerland and the UK. Even mainstream parties such as Labour and the Conservatives in the UK or the social democrats in Austria and Switzerland made populist statements. Populism was articulated by typical populist leaders, such as Nigel Farage, Heinz-Christian Strache, or Beppe Grillo, heads of states

(e.g. Werner Faymann and David Cameron), political celebrities such as Natalie Rickli, or vocal backbenchers like Lukas Reimann.

In terms of individual ideological elements, the analysis revealed that by demanding sovereignty to the people politicians include aspects of democratic theory in their arguments. They either generally mention the people as the origin of power in democracy or they demand the implementation or enhancement of direct-democratic elements, such as popular votes. In this way the populists thrive on the tension between the "redemptive" and the "pragmatic" face of democracy (Canovan, 1999, p. 8).

Besides, we showed that advocacy for the people is more than the mere mentioning of the word "people" as suggested by previous studies. It typically implies the populist actor perceiving himself as true representatives of the people. Sometimes the "people" are specified further with additional attributes or replaced by the name of the associated country.

Furthermore, we illustrated that the elites attacked by populist actors may vary substantially, be them political, economic, legal, supranational, or media elites. However, there is empirical indication that the economic elite is preferably attacked by left-wing politicians while media elites are predominantly targeted by right-wing populists. Both is compatible to their respective ideologies and thus appears plausible.

We demonstrated that the ostracism of others can be conducted either explicitly by openly denouncing certain social groups or indirectly by means of implicit negation and accusing others of ostracism. However, all these forms are predominantly propagated by right-wing parties such as Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). This is in line with Jagers and Walgrave (2007) who found that, among the political parties in Belgium, only the extreme-right Vlaams Blok exercised this form of populism.

Priester (2012) and Taggert (2004) considered the "heartland" a key element of populist ideology. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to capture the empirical invocation of the heartland in media content. Our analysis indicates that the heartland can be triggered by the mentioning of a single name or date depending on the cultural background. We conclude that the heartland may function as an ideological repository from which the populist may draw in order to enrich the thin ideology of populism with elements of nationalism, socialism, or liberalism. Therefore, the heartland may be crucial for a deeper understanding of populism and should be the subjected to further studies.

Moreover, we identified combinations of ideological elements from the spheres of the

people and the elite. We could also come up with one example spanning the full circle of the populist argument from popular sovereignty over attacks on the elite to advocacy for the people. This proves that, in particular cases, it is also possible that relatively high doses of concentrated populist ideology are transmitted through social media.

Overall, this study sheds light on an important part of the "hybrid media system" (Chadwick, 2013; Chadwick et al. 2016). When populist actors appear in the press or on TV, they have to comply to the mass media logic (Klinger and Svensson, 2015, 2016). They are usually subjected to journalistic routines and may be critically analyzed or negatively evaluated (Herkman, 2015). We could illustrate, however, that the network logic of social media gives the populists more freedom for the use of strong language when attacking the elites and ostracizing others. Social media also facilitate the use of "personal action frames" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 744) that evolve around the concept of "the people", the notion to put a certain country "first", or the inclusive "we". Based on these findings, we conclude that social media are particularly well-suited to meet the communicative preferences of populist actors and that they provide them with a convenient instrument to spread their messages. We could even go so far and argue that populism thrives on the logic of connective action. Consequently, we suggest that further studies on populism should not only focus on the mass media part of the hybrid media system but should take social media account as well.

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ARTICLE II

Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries

ABSTRACT

Parties are adapting to the new digital environment in many ways; however, the precise relations between populist communication and social media are still hardly considered. This study compares populist communication strategies on Twitter and Facebook employed by a broad spectrum of left-wing, center, and rightwing political actors in six Western democracies. We conduct a semi-automated content analysis of politicians' social media statements (N = 1400) and find that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form and is mostly used by political actors at the extremes of the political spectrum (both right-wing and left-wing), by opposition parties, and on Facebook.

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Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries

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Abstract

Parties are adapting to the new digital environment in many ways; however, the precise relations between populist communication and social media are still hardly considered. This study compares populist communication strategies on Twitter and Facebook employed by a broad spectrum of left-wing, center, and right-wing political actors in six Western democracies. We conduct a semi-automated content analysis of politicians' social media statements (*N* = 1400) and find that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form and is mostly used by political actors at the extremes of the political spectrum (both right-wing and left-wing), by opposition parties, and on Facebook.

Keywords: Populist communication; Social Media

Over the past two decades, populist actors around the globe have made headlines. Mudde (2004) even argues that populism has become "mainstream in the politics of Western democracies" (p. 542). We are also living in digital times. Online media and social network platforms offer politicians new communication channels. In the emerging hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), political actors familiar with online and offline platforms gain a crucial advantage in party politics (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016).

These new communication possibilities also affect populism. An excellent example is the case of the Spanish political movement Podemos that has challenged old media logic by intensively and successfully using digital media (Casero-Ripolles, Feenstra, & Tormey, 2016). Social media offer political actors another channel to promote themselves and actively, personally, and directly communicate with their electorate and provide politicians with unmediated and inexpensive access to voters (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). Social media as a channel fits the populist message by being non-hierarchical (Bartlett, 2014) and providing populist actors with the opportunity to circumvent traditional news channels (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017).

Although scholars have intensively investigated the relationship between political populism and the mass media, as well as political actors on social media, the combination of populist communication and social media has rarely been investigated. Most of the extant research consists of case studies of single countries, predefined populist actors, or elections (Bartlett, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2015; Groshek & Engelbert, 2013; van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). One exception is a qualitative study by Engesser, Ernst, Esser, and Büchel (2016) that investigates how politicians use social media for populist purposes.

This study embraces a broader perspective by comparing populist communication strategies of a broad spectrum of left-wing, center, and right-wing political actors on two social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) in six Western democracies (CH, DE, UK, US, IT & FR). This study investigates to what extend political actors use populist communication strategies on social media and which channel they prefer for populist communication. By identifying key aspects of populist political communication and investigating how populist communication strategies are used by various political actors on social media, we follow a *communication-centered approach* (Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017). We will show that populist communication strategies are mostly used by political actors at the edges of the political

spectrum (right-wing and left-wing) and by opposition parties. In terms of social media platforms, Facebook achieves higher populism values than Twitter.

Defining Populism and Populist Communication Strategies

At the end of the 20th century, populism was attributed with "constitutional ambiguity" (Taguieff, 1997, p. 11) and described as a "notoriously vague term" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). Accordingly, most definitions of populism suffered from "inherent incompleteness" (Taggart, 2004, p. 275).

Nowadays, scientists widely agree upon the conceptualization of populism as a *thin* (and less elaborate) ideology (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004; Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017) and as a "set of ideas" (Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015; Taggart, 2000). Other authors have conceived of populism as a communication style (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011; Canovan, 1999; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016), a political strategy (Weyland, 2001), or an instrument for mobilization (Jansen, 2011). We define populism as a *thin ideology* that, considers – from a Manichean point of view – society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the good people" versus "the bad elite" and which postulates the ultimate und unrestricted sovereignty of the people (Wirth et al., 2016).

Due to its ideological thinness, populism can be enriched with *thicker* and more substantive ideologies (Kriesi, 2014; Mudde, 2004) like nationalism, liberalism, or socialism. Depending on the supplemented ideologies, the notion of the people and the elite can vary. While right-wing populism tends to define the people as nation and is more likely to attack elites such as the current government or mass media, left-wing populism conceives the people as class and may denounce economic and religious elites (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Kriesi, 2014).

Populism maintains a complex relationship with democracy; scholars have described it both as a threat and a corrective (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). Populism presents, independent from the perspective, a serious challenge to contemporary democracies, as it rejects crucial aspects of democracies like 'checks and balances' (Kriesi, 2014). Kriesi (2014) therefore argues that the populist vision of democracy is illiberal. However, populism challenges democracies from within the democratic system (Abts & Rummens, 2007), which clearly separates it from anti-system and extremist movements (Mudde, 2004).

Following this conceptualization, populism consists of three core concepts: the people, the elite, and popular sovereignty. However, when this thin ideology is communicated to the public, the populist actor himself becomes a crucial element. The populist actor claims to represent the people's will, acts as their only true representative, and maintains a close relationship with the people. In fact, the populist actor transports the three core dimensions of populism into the public agenda by using a set of populist communication strategies. Based on the three theoretical core dimensions of populism and the existing literature discussing populist communication strategies (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011; Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), nine populist communication strategies have been developed and assigned to one of the three core dimensions of populism (Wirth et al., 2016):

The first dimension – people-centrism – consists of four strategies that advocate for the people. The populist actor can demonstrate his closeness to the people, stress their virtues, praise their achievements or describe them as a monolithic group. The second dimension – anti-elitism – combines three populist communication strategies that are all conflictive toward the elites. Populist actors discredit or blame the elite in their communication and detach the elite from the people. The last dimension of populism – restoring sovereignty – comprises two strategies. On the one hand, the populist actor demands popular sovereignty by advocating for the people's sovereignty. On the other hand, the populist actor can also establish a negative and conflictive approach by denying the elite's sovereignty. These nine populist communication strategies refer to the content of communication and are used to express support for a specific ideology.[1] The relations between the core dimensions of populism are visualized in Figure 1.

Social Media as a Platform for Populism

Social media such as networking sites (e.g., Facebook) and microblogging services (e.g., Twitter) play a major role in the political communication strategies of contemporary parties (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Unlike legacy media, social media are built upon the logic of virality, which compels political actors to communicate primarily those messages that users like, comment on, promote, and share within their networks (Klinger, 2013). It is not enough for political actors to maintain a social media account; they also need to be connected to many others because high numbers of Facebook friends and Twitter followers signal popularity.

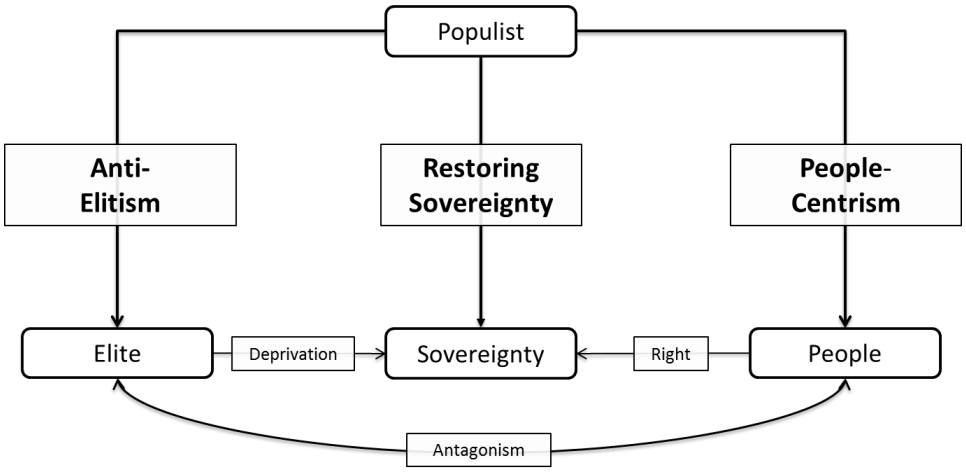

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Thin Populism

While traditional "mass media logic" is based on professional gatekeepers and a relatively passive audience, "network media logic" evolves from interest-bound and like-minded peer networks (Klinger and Svensson, 2015). Within these networks, politicians can communicate in two distinct ways (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015): By directly communicating to their followers and friends, politicians reach their "*primary audiences*" (p. 1026). This direct communication relates to the model of a one-step flow of communication introduced by Bennett and Manheim (2006). If this direct communication is re-circulated by their followers, politicians extend their network's reach to a "*secondary audience*" (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015, p. 1026). Since this indirect communication is mediated by choices of the primary audience and not controlled by the politician itself, it follows the logic of the two-step flow of communication hypothesis (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The potential of a secondary audience for political actors should not be underestimated, since followers of political actors are mainly active opinion leaders on Facebook (Karlsen, 2015) or people who have a high visibility on Twitter (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015).

A theoretical relation between populism and online communication was already established in the late 1990s by Bimber (1998), who explored the Internet's potential to "restructure political power in a populist direction" (p. 137) and the possibility of an "unmediated communication between citizens and the government" (p. 137). We argue that Bimber's argument is still valid and that the four following points underline the positive effect and opportunity structures for populist communication on social media.

First, populist actors require a "direct, unmediated access to the people's grievances" (Kriesi, 2014, p. 363) because they are the self-perceived advocates and mouthpieces of the

people. Via social media, this direct connection to the people and the political actor's followers is automatically given, due to the network characteristics. On social media, gatekeepers can neither select which messages are considered newsworthy, nor can journalists restrict and frame these messages (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). Hence, unlike press releases, populist actors can spread their messages directly and unmediated by circumventing gatekeepers (Esser et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016).

Second, social media provide populist actors with the opportunity for a close connection to the people, a crucial element for populism to flourish (Kriesi, 2014; Taggart, 2000). Social media allow populist actors to connect with their voters at a human level and possibly create stronger ties due to the lower barriers of interaction. Jacobs and Spierings (2016) describe these advantages of social media as "human-contact opportunity" (p. 23). Social media makes politicians – and populist actors in particular – more approachable, as social media can create a feeling of "social presence" (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013), which results in a stronger and closer connection between populist actors and their followers.

Third, social media enhance the potential of personalization by linking to an individual visualization of the private and personal life of the populist actor and by offering a look behind the scenes (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). Here, populist actors have a higher degree of freedom to shape their messages and focus on personalized messages by writing about their personal lives, their feelings and emotions, and their competencies and professional activities (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Finally, unlike any other media channel, social media offer the opportunity to connect with specific groups, "like-minded others", or "kindred souls" (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016, p. 24). This target-group opportunity is especially fruitful for populist actors, as they can use harsh language to attack a common enemy within their network (Engesser et al., 2016).

Taken together, the opportunities for direct and unmediated access by circumventing gatekeepers, the close connection to the people, high personalization possibilities, and the target-group opportunity render social media an especially convenient instrument for populist messages.

Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent political actors use populist communication strategies on social media and which channel they prefer for populist communication. To pursue these questions, three main hypotheses are formulated.

Numerous studies, especially those with a focus on Western democracies, have considered radical right-wing parties or actors as populist. However, our definition of populism as a *thin* ideology and the chameleonic nature of populism (Taggart, 2000) imply that populism can be combined with various ideologies and should not be exclusively restricted to right-wing parties. European examples such as the Spanish movement Podemos (Casero-Ripolles et al., 2016) show that left-wing political actors successfully use populism in their communication. Especially in the context of social media, Engesser et al. (2016) demonstrate that populist communication via social media is not restricted to alleged right-wing populist actors.

Other studies were interested in whether parties to the ends of the political spectrum are more inclined to employ populist communication strategies than parties of the center are. The available studies that are comparative in nature are so far limited to content analyses of party manifestos (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015; Steenbergen & Weber, 2015), press releases (Bernhard, 2016), or interviews with MPs (Landerer, 2014); none examined social media. They indicate, however, that radical parties are more prone than moderate parties to challenge the current establishment, attack the elite, and glorify the people in their political communication strategies. In order to ascertain whether previous findings can also be applied to the social media sector, we will test the following hypothesis:

H1: Political actors on the left and right fringes of the party spectrum use more populist communication strategies than moderate or centrist parties.

Furthermore, we argue that having a public political office or being in opposition to the government influences the amount of populism in communication on social media. Mény and Surel (2002) argue that "populist parties are by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government" and "remain predominantly in opposition" (p. 18). In line with this argument, Heinisch (2003) notes that when right-wing populist parties enter government, their unique strengths turn into disadvantages. Even where governments include a right-wing populist party, or are supported by them (Akkerman, de Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016), discrediting and blaming the alleged elites remains a core feature of populist actors. We also expect social media to be a favorite tool of the political opposition. As van Kessel and Castelein (2016) show,

populist parties mainly target incumbent mainstream parties and politicians via Twitter. Hence, the second hypothesis to be tested is:

H2: Opposition parties use a greater amount of populist communication strategies than governing parties.

Following Cranmer (2011), our third argument states that specific characteristics of a communication channel influence the degree of populist communication. Research on general political communication on social media usually does not differentiate between the various social media platforms. Empirical studies either investigate Twitter or Facebook in isolation, or summarize the two in one category, sometimes combined with further platforms such as YouTube. The results are then discussed as aggregated social media effects, with no distinction made between platform types. However, each social media platform has its own unique architecture, culture, and norms (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). The platforms also differ in terms of technical infrastructure, terminology, and appearance (Larsson, 2015). Moreover, users are fully aware of these differences and engage with the platforms differently (Yoo & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014). Especially when investigating populism, we argue that it is crucial to analyze whether the two most common and intensively used social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, differ in the degree of populist communication.

We expect that the use of populist communication strategies is higher for Facebook for the following four reasons. First, Facebook in general has more reciprocal message exchanges, which brings the users closer together and may enhance the quality of interpersonal communication (Yoo & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014) and foster social capital (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).

Second, Facebook and Twitter are different in their levels of proximity, as only Twitter allows users to remain anonymous (Yoo & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014). Friending or liking someone on Facebook requires greater commitment than simply following a Twitter account. Therefore, the connection between Facebook users is generally more intensive, personal, and intimate. Populist actors benefit from this closer connection as it helps them to demonstrate their proximity to the people and potential voters.

Third, Twitter is often described as primarily used for consuming and distributing professionally relevant information (Hermida, 2010). The average Twitter user is younger, better educated, more urban and higher in socio-economic status than the average population. Facebook, on the other hand, is more popular and socially mixed (Duggan, et al.,

2015). Twitter is moreover widely used by journalist as a reporting (Vis, 2013) and research tool (Swasy, 2016). Due to Twitter's stronger professional and purpose orientation, political actors may consider it less suitable for spreading blunt and emotional appeals than Facebook.

Finally, Facebook has an advantage in that messages are not limited to 140 characters, which gives political actors the opportunity to make their case more effectively and elaborately. The unlimited space, in combination with the longer lifespan of Facebook posts, is the fourth factor expected to lead to higher levels of populist communication on Facebook. Hence, the third hypothesis reads as follows:

H3: The extent of populist communication strategies is higher on Facebook than on Twitter.

Method

We conducted a semi-automated content analysis (Wettstein, 2014b) of Facebook post and Tweets by 88 leading politicians from six countries during a three-month period in 2015 using the coding interface *Angrist* (Wettstein, 2014a). Twitter and Facebook were chosen because they are currently the two most popular services, especially for political actors (Larsson, 2015).

Sample

We selected six Western democracies (CH, DE, UK, US, IT, and FR) that are broadly similar in some but sufficiently different in other respects. The sample provides sufficient variability regarding parliamentary vs presidential systems, representative vs directional systems, consensus vs majoritarian systems, strong vs weak standing of populist parties (in parliament or public opinion), or higher vs lower consumption of social media for political information purposes (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017).

As populism is a transnational phenomenon that can be found across borders, we are not focusing on comparing single nations but on comparing political parties and social media platforms. By comparing the relationships between party types (H1, H2) or platform types (H3) and populist communication, the consideration of our six countries serves as a robustness check to determine whether these relationships hold in different contexts. If we are able to confirm the relationships between our independent and dependent variables in this multitude of countries, it would raise the confidence in the validity and generalizability of our findings substantially.

For each country, we selected five parties: on the one hand, the four largest parties in parliament across the left-right spectrum; on the other hand, the most influential party commonly described as populist in the scientific literature. Table 1 provides an overview of the 29 selected parties.

Table 1*:* Sample of Political Parties including Ideological Stance Score (CHES)

Country	Political stance				
	Left	Moderate left	Center	Moderate right	Right
CH	Green Party of Switzerland 1.9	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland [b] 2.1	Christian Democratic People's Party [b] 5.5	FDP. The Liberals [b] 6.9	Swiss People's Party [a b] 8.3
DE	Alliance'90/ The Greens 3.6	Social Democratic Party of Germany [b] 3.8	Union Party [b] 5.9	Free Democratic Party 6.5	Alternative for Germany [a] 8.9
FR	Europe Ecology – The Greens 3.1	Socialist Party [b] 3.8	The Democratic Movement 5.9	The Republicans 7.7	National Front [a] 9.6
IT	Federation of the Greens 1.3	Democratic Party [b] 3.6 Five Star Movement [a] 4.7	Civic Choice [b] 5.4	Forza Italia [a] 6.7	
UK	Green Party 1.9	Labour Party 3.6	Liberal Democrats 4.9	Conservative Party [b] 7.0	UK Independence Party [a] 9.1
USA	Green Party	Democratic Party [b]		Republican Party	Tea Party Movement [a]

Note: [a] = party widely described as populist in the literature; M5S was prioritized over Lega Nord, due to its stronger social media affinity and because another right-wing populist party, Berlusconi's Forza Italia, was already part of the sample; [b] = governing party

Within each party, politicians were selected according to two criteria: on the one hand, according to the highest hierarchical position in the country or party (head of government and/or party leader) in 2015; on the other hand, according to the highest social media resonance (most followers on Twitter) in January 2015. With regard to the first criterion, we accounted for the fact that party leaders can serve different functions in different political systems; with regard to the second criterion, only the number of Twitter followers was consulted to ensure equivalence across countries.[2] Based on this selection procedure, the verified Facebook and Twitter profiles of 110 politicians were included in the sample (for details, see Table 4 in the online appendix). Party leaders or head of government without a social media account could not be considered.

The social media material was downloaded using the tool *Facepager* (Keyling & Jünger, 2013) during a three-month period from September until November 2015. We selected a political routine-time period to ensure we captured debates on a variety of political issues. A partial exception was Switzerland where parliamentary elections were held in October; however, due to the Swiss direct democratic system, elections are considered less relevant than the numerous referenda and initiatives about the 'really important' issues (no public vote took place during sampling period). Included in the analysis are only Tweets and Facebook posts that include actual statements of a politician and are longer than eight characters. Simple retweets as well as Tweets or Facebook posts including only pictures, links, or videos were excluded from the analysis. This procedure provided a large universe of Facebook posts (*N* = 10,069) and Tweets (*N* = 28,761) from which we drew a randomized sample of not more than 50 Tweets and 50 Facebook posts per politician (if possible). This yielded an initial sample of 4,698 items.

Of this initial sample, we processed only those Tweets and posts that included a veritable statement by a politician which contained either a position or an elaboration on a political issue or an evaluation or an attribution of a target actor (*N* = 1,440). We discarded the rest; we further excluded politicians with less than five statements in total. This led to a final sample of *N* = 845 Facebook posts and *N* = 555 Tweets sent out by 88 politicians. For testing the first two hypotheses, the data are aggregated on the level of politicians; for analyzing the third hypothesis, the data is calculated on the statement level without any aggregation.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis is a single statement made by a politician's respective social media account (speaker) on a target actor or an issue. A social media statement can contain one or several of these statements by one speaker. Speaker, target actor, and issue are defined as follows:

Speaker: A politician's respective social media account is considered a speaker. Because retweets are excluded from the analysis, only statements that are written by the politicians have been included.

Target actor: An actor characterized or evaluated by a speaker's statement counts as target actor, such as other politicians, organizations, elites, the people, etc. The speaker himself can also be a target actor when he utters a statement about himself.

Issue: An issue is a subject area addressed by a speaker's statement, such as an election, immigration, or security.

Strategies that advocate for the people (people-centrism) or attack elites (anti-elitism) are measured at the level of the speaker's statements about target actors. The strategies that protect sovereignty (restoring sovereignty) are coded as statements on issues.

A team of intensively trained student coders reached acceptable levels of reliability. The average Brennan and Prediger's kappa across all strategies is .83 (see online appendix, table 6)[3]. All coders had to pass an initial reliability test (137 statements) before being admitted to the coder pool. Additionally, a concealed reliability test (382 statements) was conducted during regular coding sessions.

Operationalization

Populist communication strategies. The nine populist communication strategies are operationalized using a broad set of categories (for details see online appendix, table 3). These variables can be regarded as formative measures, which means that a strategy is not required to be internally consistent in order to be reliable or valid (Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008). For each category, we code whether a given social media statement is present or not. A strategy is considered present if at least one of its respective categories is identified in a statement. The dependent variable – populism index – is present if at least one of the nine populist communication strategies is present. Original examples of populist statements are reported in table 5 in the online appendix.

Party categories. The 88 politicians belonging to 29 different parties are first placed on a left and right spectrum using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2014). The parties are assigned to categories based on their score on the overall ideological stance (see Table 1). We had to assign the four US-American parties ourselves because the CHES data only include European countries. Additionally, we calculate an indicator of party extremism by centering the original CHES score. For each party score, we subtract the theoretical center of the scale (minus 5) and square each result to obtain a measure of party extremism. High levels on the scale identify parties – both left- and right-wing – at the extreme of the political spectrum; low levels characterize parties based at the center of the spectrum.[4] Next to party ideology, a dummy for parties that were not in the government during the three-month time period (opposition party) and a dummy for Facebook is calculated.

Findings

Sample Description

Overall, the results reveal that roughly every tenth statement on Twitter and Facebook (10.6%) contains at least one populist communication strategy (Figure 2). Anti-elitist sentiments are slightly more prominent (6.4%) than strategies on the people-centrism dimension (4.3%), whereas strategies that protect popular sovereignty are almost absent (0.1%). A closer look at the strategies level reveals that blaming (4%) and discrediting elites (3.5%), describing a monolithic people (2.8%), and demonstrating closeness to the people (1.6%) are the most frequent strategies.

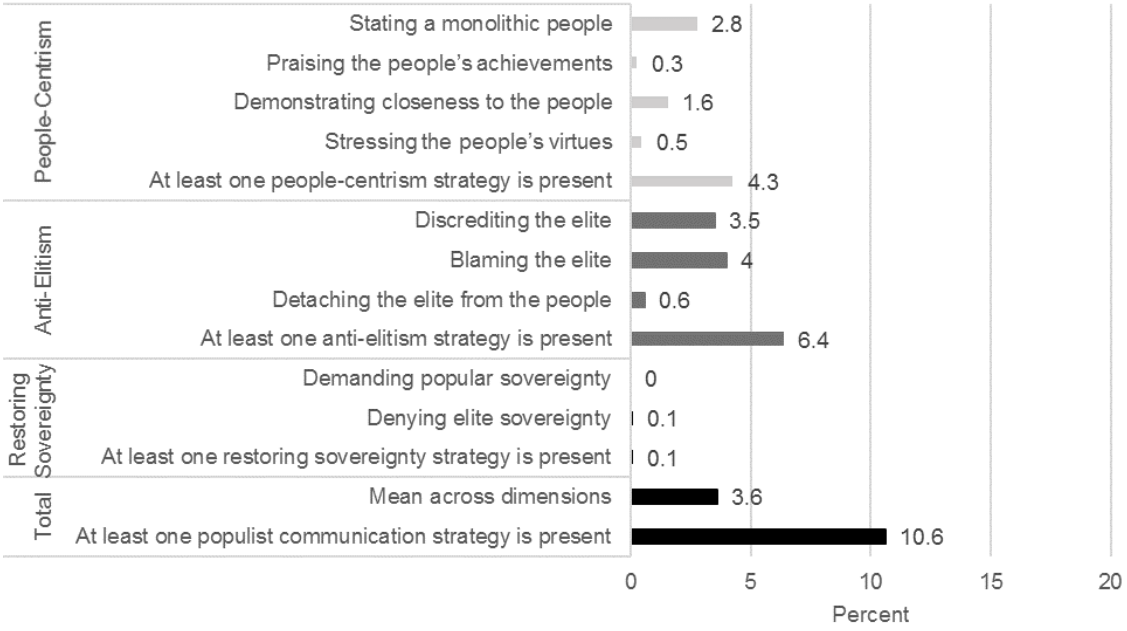

Figure 2: Share of all Populist Communication Strategies (*N* = 1400)

Note: The figure depicts the proportion of the nine populist communication strategies, the three sub-dimensions and an overall amount in percent.

Hypotheses

To test the three hypotheses, we conduct analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) using the populism index as the dependent variable. The independent variables vary respectively (extreme vs centrist party, opposition vs government party, Facebook vs Twitter) for each analysis. For the first two hypotheses, conducted at the level of political actors, a dummy controlling for national elections in Switzerland is included. For the third hypothesis, the length of all Twitter and Facebook statements is included as a control variable in the analysis.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that political actors placed on the left and right fringes of the party spectrum use more populist communication strategies than moderate or centrist parties

do. This hypothesis is supported ($F(4, 83) = 2.88$, $p < .05$, $\eta 2 = .123$)[5]. Figure 3 plots the mean values of the different parties on the left-right scale for the populism index (for a detailed overview, see table 7 in the online appendix). As predicted, politicians belonging to right parties used populist communication strategies most frequently ($M = .14$, $SD = .08$), followed by moderate right ($M = .11$, $SD = .10$) and left parties ($M = .10$, $SD = .08$). Moderate left ($M = .07$, $SD = .08$) and center parties ($M = .05$, $SD = .11$) use almost no populist communication strategies in their social media communication. The use of populist communication is therefore stronger for politicians belonging to parties at the extremes of the political spectrum. Moreover, the analysis shows that all right-wing parties score higher on the populism index than left-wing parties.

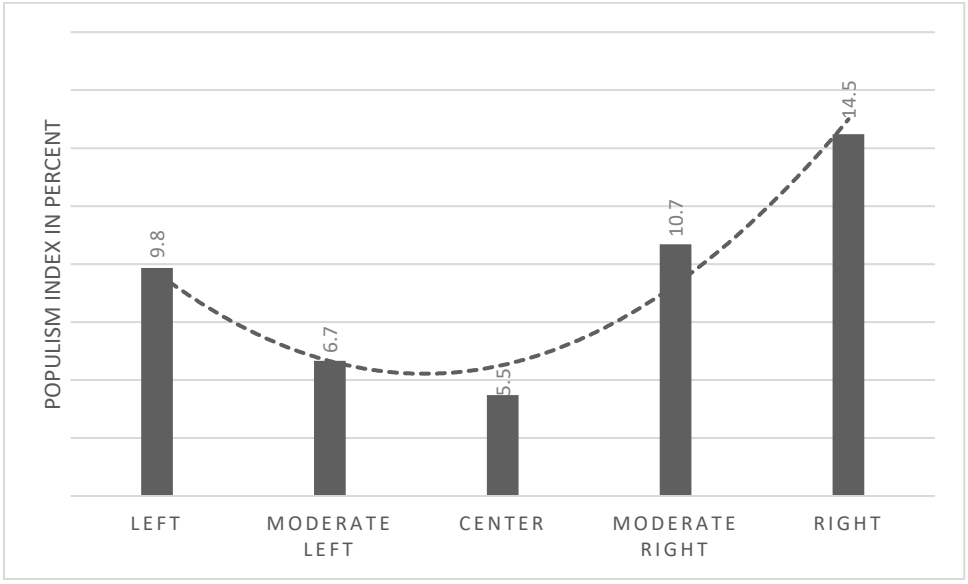

Figure 3: Use of Populist Communication Strategies by Parties on the Left-Right Scale

Hypothesis 2 anticipates that opposition parties use a higher amount of populist communication strategies than governing parties do. This hypothesis is supported ($F(1, 85) = 8.58$, $p < .01$, $\eta 2 = .092$)[6]. As expected, overall populist communication via social media is higher for opposition parties ($M = .11$, $SD = .09$) than parties currently in government ($M = .05$, $SD = .07$).

The third hypothesis predicts that the extent of populist communication strategies is higher on Facebook than on Twitter. The analysis reveals that indeed, overall populist communication is higher on Facebook ($M = .13$, $SD = .33$) than on Twitter ($M = .07$, $SD = .26$). Hence, the third hypothesis can be supported ($F(1, 1394) = 10.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .007$)[7].

For the purpose of multivariate validation, we test the effects of all three independent variables on populist communication in a single OLS regression model. The analysis includes party extremism and dummies for opposition parties and Facebook. As the United States is not included in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, US parties are excluded from this analysis. The findings confirm that populist communication is higher for extreme (β = .061, p < .05) and opposition parties (β = .093, p < .001) as well as on Facebook (β = .085, p < .001)[8]. On statement level the explained variance of the model is rather small (R^2 = 0.021). However, if the data is aggregated to higher levels, the explained variance increases to 12 percent at the level of politicians (R^2 = 0.123) and 31 percent at the level of parties (R^2 = 0.312). The regression analysis cross-validates the argument that populist communication is dependent on each of the included independent variables (see Table 2).

Table 2: OLS regression of populist communication strategies (N = 1205)

	Populist communication strategies				
	b	*SE*	*β*	*Tolerance*	*VIF*
Constant	.019	.020			
Party extremism	.003	.002	.061*	.88	1.13
Opposition party	.059	.019	.093***	.89	1.11
Facebook	.054	.018	.085***	.98	1.02
Adjusted R^2	0.019***				

Notes: OLS: ordinary least squares; *SE*: standard error.
***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate which political actors use populist communication strategies on social media and which social media platform they prefer. We define populism as a thin ideology with three core dimensions of populism (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring sovereignty) as a starting point to deduce nine populist communication strategies. We theorized that four characteristics make social media highly compatible with populist communication: A direct access to the audience without journalistic interference, a close connection to the people, an infinite potential for personalization, and the possibility to target specific groups.

We find evidence that an extreme party position and opposition status favor an increased use of populist communication on social media. Political actors placed on the left and right fringes of the party spectrum (both right- and left-wing fringe parties) draw on populist strategies more often than centrist parties do. This result supports the first

hypothesis. This pattern is consistent in Switzerland, Germany, US and the UK (with exception for the Green Party). In Southern Europe however, we identified a linear increase of populist communication from left to right-wing parties. We speculate that this is influenced by the disillusionment of Italian and French left-wing parties since the 1960s: However, future research should investigate this further. Consistent with previous results, right-wing parties use populism to a higher degree than left-wing parties; in our sample, the right-wing parties were usually those that are also labeled as populists. With regard to the discussion about populism as a "thin" ideology that is enriched with specific "thick" ideologies (Kriesi, 2014; Mudde, 2004), our findings indicate that in the analyzed Western democracies populism it is more often combined with elements of right-wing ideologies than left-wing ideas. However, our results also challenge a commonly held assumption – especially in the context of European Western democracies – that populism is *only* a right-wing phenomenon. Fringe parties located at the (far) left also use a great amount of populism in their social media communication.

Our study further demonstrates – on the solid base of a six-country sample – that opposition parties use higher amounts of populist communication strategies on social media than government parties. This finding corroborates our second hypothesis and fits earlier findings that populist communication is mainly used for attacking and discrediting the political elite by simultaneously advocating for the people. The third important result of the study is the necessary differentiation between the two social media platforms and the conclusion that both fringe and opposition parties rely in particular on Facebook for their populist communication strategies. Facebook's advantages include higher levels of proximity and reciprocity, unlimited space for messages, and its non-elite character. We can support our third hypothesis because Facebook seems to be the preferred channel for political actors to advocate for the people and blame or criticize elites. Switzerland is the only country that reports higher levels of populism on Twitter, which may be influenced by the occurrence of the national election. This Swiss finding also fits recent US experience where the 2016 presidential election campaign also favored an avid Twitter user. Future studies should investigate if Facebook is still the preferred communication channel for populism after 2017 and during election campaigns.

Taken together, these comparisons demonstrate that populist communication is indeed affine to social media. Fringe and opposition parties use these channels to communicate directly with voters by bypassing the journalistic filters. They do so to get their

messages out that might be less visible in legacy media. Furthermore, the fact that the amount of populism is higher on Facebook is a further indicator that Facebook lends itself to establishing a close connection to specific target groups and to personalized communication.

We further found that populism manifests itself in a fragmented form. The dimension of restoring sovereignty is almost absent, and the two existing core dimensions of populism hardly ever co-occur on social media. However, the finding that all analyzed statistical relations are robust across the dimensions of people-centrism and anti-elitism shows that these are both relevant dimensions that complement each other. Despite the fragmented empirical manifestation of populism, we argue that our strategy to identify three core dimensions of populism is a fruitful approach. Schulz et al. (2017) demonstrated that the three-dimension approach is essential for systemizing populist attitudes. Additionally, we were able to identify some statements that included both dimensions in one statement. Moreover, twenty percent of our investigated politicians combine at least two dimensions across all of their messages. This means that on the politicians' level, social media users are confronted with both dimensions.

Despite some exceptions, populism on social media is a fragmented phenomenon and the complete picture of the three core dimensions hardly ever occurs. This is in line with Engesser et al.'s (2016) results. They present three arguments: (1) politicians may reduce the complexity of the thin ideology to make it more comprehensive for their followers; (2) politicians may keep the populist ideology ambiguous and malleable to open the possibility that users can complement it with their own political attitudes; and (3) fragments of populism may travel more easily below the radar of political opponents and critical observers.

Additionally, the question of why the dimension of restoring sovereignty is practically absent must be addressed. The absence may be explained by the fact that demanding popular sovereignty for the people or denying sovereignty of elites may be something that is essential for the ideology of populism but not communicated via the personal and extremely direct channels of social media. Although populist actors are aware of this important dimension, they may consciously decide not to communicate this part of the ideology. Moreover, the idea of restoring sovereignty may be captured to some extent within the other two dimensions.

There are some limitations of this study that must be considered. One limitation is the rather low sample size in terms of selected countries, included parties, and platforms. Accordingly, the findings represent a specific sample of countries and parties and any

generalizations must be drawn carefully. Because the party sample includes more far right-wing parties scoring high on the CHES score, it would be beneficial to include more far left parties in the sample such as the German “The Left”, the French “Left Front”, or the Italian “Communist Refoundation Party” to further investigate the use of populist communication by fringe parties. However, in the six selected countries, far left wing parties have low vote shares on the national level and mostly non-influential actors in the national political process.[9] Nevertheless, it would be interesting to include them in the analysis to examine if the identified U-curve withstands and even further increases on the left side. Adding additional social media platforms such as YouTube or online media like political blogs would shed some more light on the question of which is the favorite online channel for populism.

A second limitation is the routine-time period without any elections. Populist communication might be different during election campaigns, and show a more complete picture of populism. Moreover, during the three-month period, migration was a highly debated issue. The discussion of the migration wave was fertile ground for populism, especially on the right-wing spectrum, which may explain the higher presence of populist communication compared to left wing parties during that time. Future studies should strive to sample both routine periods as well as election campaigns to compare populist communication across these different modes of operation.

Another limitation is that only populist communication strategies have been investigated and potential populist style elements such as dramatization, or black and white rhetoric have been neglected. By not only focusing on the content of a communicated populist ideology and taking the way this content is communicated into account, a more complete picture of the populist communication could be presented.

A final limitation is the fact that only written statements by politicians are analyzed. Including posted links, pictures, videos, or retweets might help to answer the question about the complete nature of populist communication on social media. Especially analyzing the messages of posted pictures and videos might prove fruitful.

To conclude, this study adds to the current research on populist communication in the media by systematically investigating how politicians use populist communication strategies in their day-to-day social media communication. Future research should follow a communication-centered approach and investigate the broad political spectrum, with a special emphasis on right- but also left-wing fringe parties. Moreover, it is crucial to

differentiate between the various social media platforms. Moreover, the next logical step would be to investigate the use of populist communication in different media outlets by comparing communication on social media with traditional on- and offline news media, broadcast news, or political talk shows.

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Notes

[1] Populist styles like emotional or colloquial language, simplification or scandalization on the other hand refer to the way the content is presented.
[2] Politicians with high social media resonance are identified through the following sources:
CH: http://twittermonitor.somepolis.ch
DE: http://www.bundestwitter.de/politiker and https://pluragraph.de/categories/politik
FR: http://www.elus20.fr/classement-politique-twitter-facebook/#twitter
and http://ymobactus.miaouw.net/labo-top-politiques.php
IT: http://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/italy/society/politics
UK: https://thegeographist.wordpress.com/2014/10/08/uk-100-most-followed-british-politicians-on-twitter
US: http://www.davemanuel.com/the-most-popular-us-politicians-by-twitter-followers-163
and http://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/united-states/society/politics/
[3] As the distribution of populist statements in the reliability test is skewed and most individual statements do not contain any populism, we use Brennan and Prediger's Kappa (Brennan & Prediger, 1981) as a measure of reliability. As Quarfoot and Levine (2016) have shown, this measure is more robust in assessing reliability of rare categories than Krippendorff's Alpha and Cohen's Kappa (p. 397).
[4] The sample contains parties with higher right-wing scores compared to left-wing parties, which results in a slight positive skewness (.217) of party extremism.
[5] We can report the same pattern for the single sub-dimensions: parties at the extremes of the political spectrum use more anti-elitist ($F(4, 83) = 3.74$, $p < .01$, $\eta 2 = .154$) and people-centrist statements ($F(4, 83) = .181$, *ns*, $\eta 2 = .009$). Country comparison for the overall use of populism revealed the same u-curve for DE, CH, UK and US. However, in southern Europe (FR and IT) the pattern is different as we report a linear increase form left to right-wing parties.
[6] Opposition parties used more populism across all six democracies and both dimensions: anti-elitism ($F(1, 85) = 9.91$, $p < .01$, $\eta 2 = .104$) and people-centrism ($F(1, 85) = .444$, *ns*, $\eta 2 = .005$).
[7] The degree of anti-elitism ($F(1, 1394) = 2.07$, $p < .05$, $\eta 2 = .001$) and people-centrism ($F(1, 1394) = 8.85$, $p < .01$, $\eta 2 = .006$) is higher on Facebook than on Twitter. Country comparison revealed that Switzerland is the only country where Twitter reported higher degrees of populism compared to Facebook ($F(1, 214) = 5.315$, $p < .05$, $\eta 2 = .024$.
[8] When the absolute value instead of squared scores of party extremism is included in the OLS regression, the effects for opposition parties ($\beta = .096$, $p < .001$) and Facebook ($\beta = .085$, $p < .001$) are identical. For party extremism, we can only report a trend ($\beta = .056$, $p = .065$).
[9] With exception of the German «The Left» which is especially on the regional level, more influential by being part of the regional governments compared the other far left parties.

ARTICLE III

Bipolar Populism? The Use of Anti-Elitism and People-Centrism by Swiss Parties on Social Media

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Bipolar populism? The use of anti-elitism and people-centrism by Swiss parties on social media

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Keywords: Populist communication, Facebook, Twitter, Switzerland, Extreme parties

Social media have changed politics. The days of politicians being almost entirely dependent on professional journalists to distribute their messages to the wider public are over. In hybrid media systems, where new and old media are increasingly intertwined and complement each other (Chadwick 2013; Kübler and Kriesi, 2017), politicians can choose from a variety of communication channels to achieve their goals. Twitter and Facebook, in particular, provide political actors with unfiltered access to the public and allow politicians to communicate directly with their voters (Golbeck et al. 2010; Jacobs and Spierings 2016; Esser et al. 2017). These opportunities allow populist politicians such as Beppe Grillo or Geert Wilders to spread their messages to their voters without any journalistic intervention. In sum, social media are particularly well-suited as channels of populist communication (Ernst et al. 2017a): They provide direct access to the public without external interference; they offer the possibility of establishing a close and direct connection to the people; they foster the potential for targeted, personalized forms of communication; and they can create a feeling of community, belonging and recognition among otherwise scattered groups (see also Engesser et al. 2017b).

Against this backdrop, it is obvious that the National Center of Competence in Research on 'Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century' (NCCR Democracy) decided to examine the relation between populism and social media in more detail. The introductory text to this debate section (by Kübler and Kriesi, 2017) has already established the wider context and explained the relationship between mediatization, globalization and the populist response. Of particular interest for this article are the new opportunities provided by new media to political actors. In a previous publication, we have demonstrated – by way of qualitative analysis – how populist actors craft their messages when spreading aspects of their ideology via the media (see Engesser et al. 2017a). In another six-country quantitative analysis, we established that, compared with centrist parties, extreme and opposition parties are more populist on social media and that they use Facebook more often than Twitter for populist communication, at least outside of election campaign periods (Ernst et al. 2017a).

The present article expands on these earlier NCCR publications and seeks to demonstrate that parties at both fringes of the political spectrum are more inclined than mainstream political parties to use populist communication on social media. The specific affinity of extreme parties for populist communication has already been documented by other scholars who analyzed party manifestos (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Steenbergen and

Weber 2015), press releases (Bernhard 2016) and interviews with parliamentarians (Landerer 2014). We advance the existing literature by extending the validity of this pattern to social media. We focus our analysis on two dimensions of populism – people-centrism and anti-elitism – and explore how often these dimensions are addressed by left-wing and right-wing parties in their respective online communication repertoires. We will utilize a dataset that includes information on a wide range of parties from five Western democracies, and, after a brief comparative overview, will focus on the exemplary case of Switzerland. We will investigate, in-depth, how five major Swiss parties use populist communication and whether they prefer people-centrism or anti-elitism in their messages on Facebook and Twitter.

Populist Communication and its Measurement

Populism is defined as a *thin* ideology (Aalberg et al. 2017; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Abts and Rummens 2007; Mudde 2004; Kübler & Kriesi, 2017) that considers society to be separated in two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the "the good people" versus "the bad elite," and postulates the unrestricted sovereignty of the people (Wirth et al. 2016). Due to its ideological thinness, populism can be enriched with thicker ideologies (Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2004) such as nativism, authoritarianism, liberalism, or socialism. Therefore, populism is not an exclusively right-wing phenomenon. Rather, European examples, such as the Greek party Syriza (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014) or the Spanish movement Podemos (Casero-Ripolles et al. 2016), illustrate that left-wing political actors use populism in their communication, too.

Once conceptualized as a thin ideology, populism can be regarded as consisting of three core dimensions: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and demands for restoring national sovereignty (Wirth et al. 2016). These ideological components are further broken down into "key messages" (see Table 1) when populist actors communicate them to the public via the media. We conducted a statement-level quantitative content analysis of the Tweets and Facebook posts of 77 politicians from five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and United Kingdom) during a three-month period in 2015[1]. For each country, we investigated the five largest parties in parliament across the left-right spectrum. In Switzerland, for instance, this included – from left to right – the Green Party (GPS), the Social Democrats (SP), the Christian Democrats (CVP), the Liberals (FDP) and the Swiss People's Party

[1] Analyzed are the official and verified Facebook and Twitter accounts of 77 politicians

(SVP). In the 2015 general election, these five parties received an aggregated total of 83 percent of the Swiss vote share (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2015).

Across all countries, we selected politicians for inclusion in our study according to two criteria: they held a high position within government or their party (e.g., head of government or party leader) or had high resonance on social media (followers on Twitter) as of January 2015. For the final analysis, we considered only those Tweets and Facebook posts by politicians that explicitly addressed an issue or a social actor. This yielded 1,220 social media statements, of which 217 were made by Swiss politicians.

The units of analysis are single social media statements made by a 'speaker' about an 'issue' or about a 'target actor'. Statements could contain one or several populist messages by one speaker. A team of multi-lingual student coders were trained extensively until their intercoder agreement scores reached acceptable levels of reliability (Brennan and Prediger's $\kappa = .83$).

Behind the three dimensions of people-centrism, anti-elitism and demands for restoring sovereignty, we identified nine concrete populist "key messages" (Table 1). Theoretically speaking, these key messages denote sentence-level speech acts by politicians or other communicators, and these statements are the communicative building blocks of larger ideological dimensions. The *nine key populist messages* that we derived from the relevant research literature (see Wirth et al., 2016) are listed in Table 1. To measure the occurrence of these key messages, we developed a codebook with several categories for each key message. When at least one of the nine key messages was evident in a social media post, we treated this occurrence as a manifestation of 'populist communication'.

To locate European parties and their politicians on the left-right scale, we relied on the classification system of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al. 2014). For a more thorough description of the methodological procedures, we refer the reader to our previous study, published as Ernst et al. (2017a).

Table 1: Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Communication

Dimension	Populist "key messages"	Underlying ideology	Content analysis categories used to capture key message on social media
Anti-Elitism	Discrediting the elite	Elites are corrupt.	Elites are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc. The elite are called names and denied morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc.
	Blaming the elite	Elites are harmful.	Elites are described as a threat/burden, responsible for negative developments/situations, or as having committed mistakes or crimes. Elites are described as not being a source of enrichment or responsible for positive developments/situations.
	Detaching the elite from the people	Elites do not represent the people.	Elites are described as not belonging to the people, not being close to the people, not knowing the people, not speaking for the people, not caring for the people, or not performing everyday actions.
People-Centrism	Stressing the people's virtues	The people are virtuous.	The people are bestowed with morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc. The people are exempt from being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc.
	Praising the people's achievements	The people are beneficial.	The people are described as being an enrichment or responsible for a positive development/situation. The people are described as not being a threat/burden, not being responsible for negative developments/situations, nor as having committed mistakes or crimes.
	Stating a monolithic people	The people are homogenous.	People are described as sharing common feelings, desires, or opinions.
	Demonstrating closeness to the people	The populist represents the people.	The speaker describes himself as belonging to the people, being close to the people, knowing the people, speaking for the people, caring for the people, agreeing with the people, or performing everyday actions. The speaker claims to represent or embody the people.
Restoring Sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty	The people are the ultimate sovereign.	The speaker argues for general institutional reforms to grant the people more power (by introducing direct-democratic elements or increasing political participation). The speaker argues in favor of granting more power to the people within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).
	Denying elite sovereignty	The elites deprive the people of their sovereignty.	The speaker argues in favor of granting less power to elites within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).

Findings

To explore whether parties from either end of the political spectrum are more prone to using populist communication, we conducted linear and quadratic OLS regressions. We used the amount of populist communication on social media as the dependent variable and the CHES score for parties as the independent variable. Across all 25 investigated parties from

five countries, we found that every tenth Facebook or Twitter statement (11%) contained at least one populist key message. Whereas the first two dimensions are used with almost equal frequency – six percent of social media statements are anti-elitist and five percent are people-centrist – the third dimension and the associated demands for more national sovereignty remain largely unused (below 1%) during the study period.

More importantly, our findings show a clear U-curve pattern, illustrating that extreme parties use more populist key messages than center parties across the five countries. The respective quadratic regression explains 30% of variance ($p < .05$). In this way, we support previous empirical evidence that both left- and right-wing politicians use populism in their communication (Cranmer 2011; Jagers and Walgrave 2007) – but we can extend this finding to five countries and to social media.

Separate quadratic regression analyses for each country reveal that the U-curve pattern is consistent for Germany ($R^2 = .66$), Great Britain ($R^2 = .70$) and Switzerland ($R^2 = .93$).[2] In fact, Switzerland represents an "exemplary case" in this regard, with 93 percent of Swiss parties' political communication styles explained by this U-curved pattern (see Figure 1). Because Switzerland illustrates the essential features of "bipolar populism" so well, we will analyze this case in the remainder of this article more thoroughly (on the value of exemplary case study analysis, see Yin 2003).[3]

In Switzerland, five percent of all social media messages contain at least one populist key message. If we look at the individual parties, we see in Figure 1 that the SVP (11%), GPS (6%) and FDP (6%) particularly use populism in their Twitter and Facebook communication, whereas the CVP (3%) and SP (2%) are more reluctant to use populist communication. It is thus not only the usual suspect SVP that resorts to populist key messages (Ernst et al. 2017a) but also the Green Party (March 2007). However, we have reasonable grounds on which to believe that behind this apparent resemblance, there are notable differences in the use of populist online communication by right- and left-wing parties.

[2] In Italy ($R^2 = .90$) and France ($R^2 = .94$), we find a significant *linear* effect from left to right but not a curvilinear effect. This indicates that in these two countries, the New Left (Greens) refrains from populist communication, whereas the New Right (Forza Italia, National Front) relies on it heavily. This can be traced back to the peculiar histories of the Italian and French left-wing parties since the 1960s.

[3] For a more comparative cross-national picture see Ernst et al. (2017a).

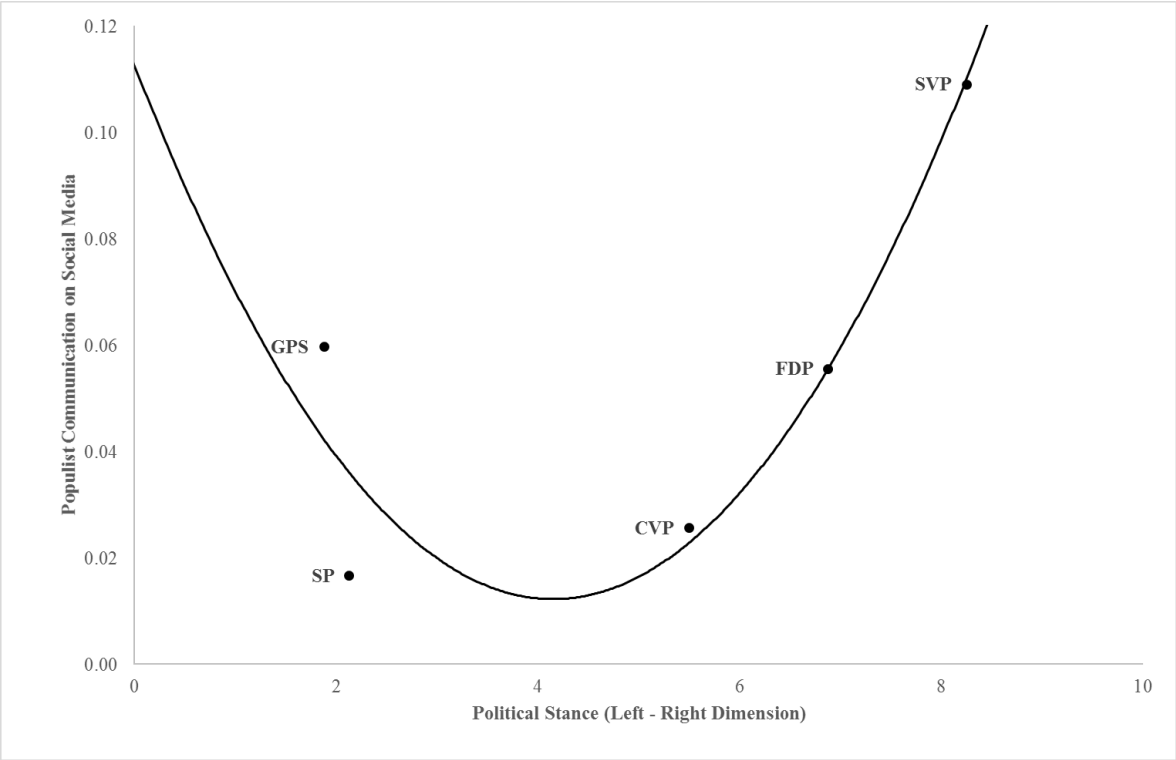

Figure 1: Amount of populist communication on social media by Swiss parties

To gain a better understanding of this difference, we divide the broad concept of populist communication (Figure 1) into its main sub-dimensions: people-centrism (Figure 2) and anti-elitism (Figure 3). The third dimension, demands to restore sovereignty, is not considered further in this analysis because of its rare occurrence. Starting with people-centrism, it becomes immediately clear from Figure 2 that this dimension is mostly used by the left-wing Greens and Social Democrats, while it remains largely ignored by the centrist and right-wing parties. The linear regression expressing the relationship between people-centrism and left-wing party orientation explains 72 percent (p = .68) of the social media communication of Swiss politicians. Particularly, the GPS uses messages on social media that advocate for the people. These messages stress the people's virtues and achievements and are designed to express closeness between Green politics and the people. In summary, our results support earlier findings by Jagers and Walgrave (2007) that Green and Social Democratic parties also behave in a partially populist manner – not by excluding outsiders but by championing the causes of 'the people'.

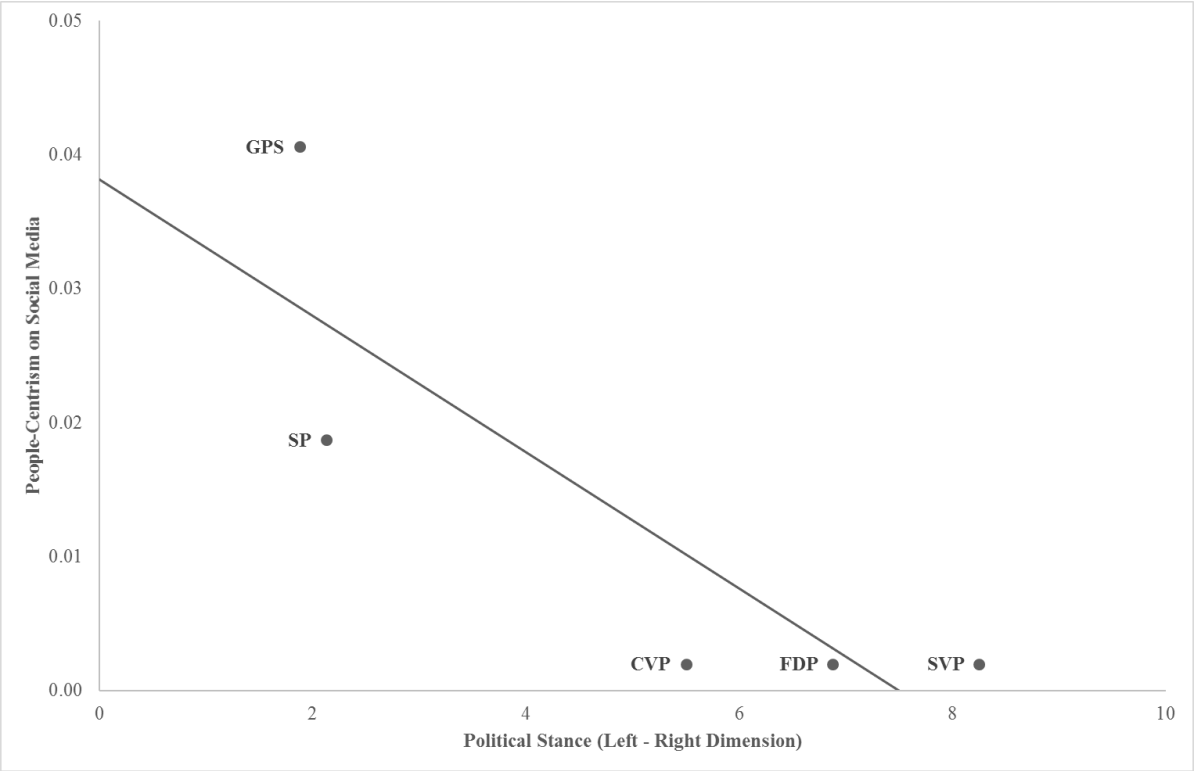

Figure 2: Amount of people-centrist messages on social media by Swiss parties

Moving to the individual analysis of anti-elitism (Figure 3), we find another very clear relationship: The farther right a party is located on the political spectrum, the more it uses anti-elitist messages in its social media communication. The linear regression explains 77% of variance ($p < .05$). Particularly, SVP and FDP circulate conflictual messages against the elites; these messages tend to discredit elites, blame them for alleged failures and present elites as detached from the 'the people'. Again, we can corroborate the finding of Jagers and Walgrave (2007) that right-wing parties tend to rely on exclusivist communication that is negative toward elites.

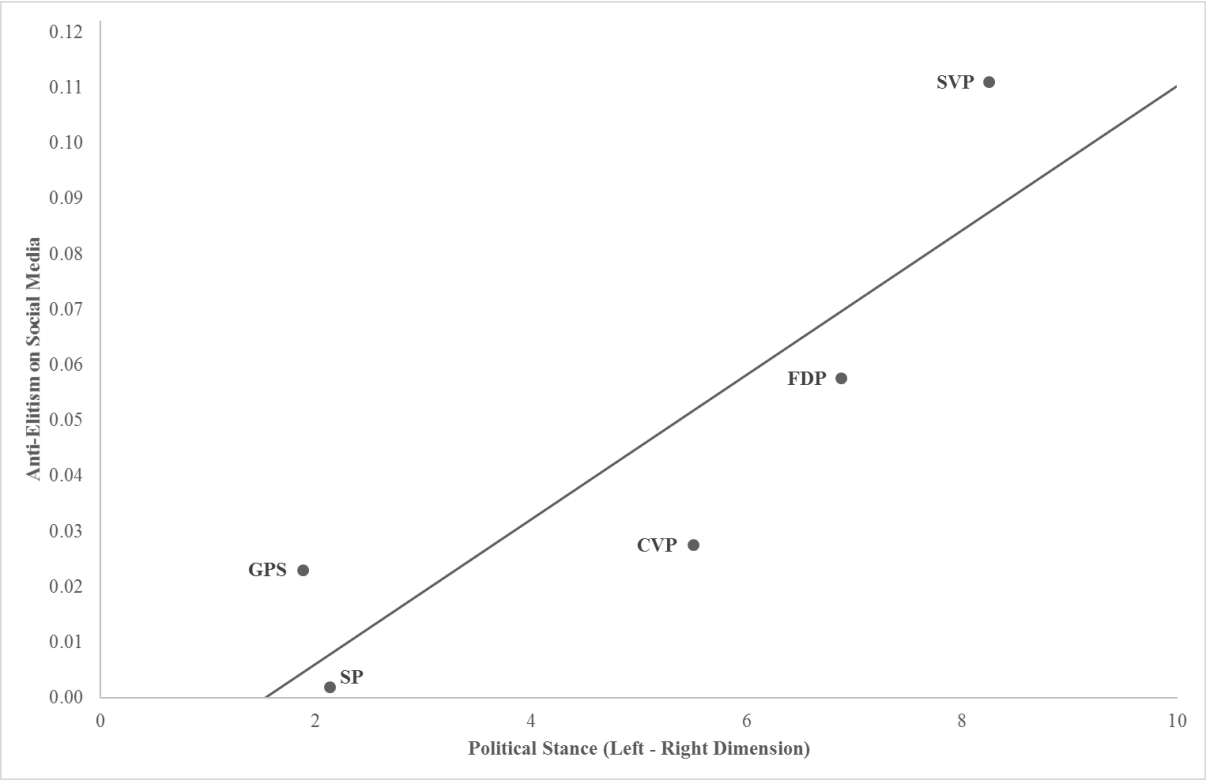

Figure 3: Amount of anti-elitist messages on social media by Swiss parties

Conclusion and Outlook

The brief analysis presented here supports previous findings that parties at both ends of the political spectrum have a greater affinity for populist communication than moderate mainstream parties do. Furthermore, by investigating the exemplary case of Switzerland in more detail, we can confirm that it is not only the SVP that uses populist key messages (e.g. Engesser et al., 2017a; Cranmer, 2011) but that the GPS and FDP rely on populist communication too. By analyzing the two major dimensions of populism separately, we also demonstrated that left-wing parties tend to emphasize people-centrist messages, whereas right-wing parties tend to use anti-elitist messages more.

It is noteworthy that the two dimensions invite different styles of political communication: whereas the first is more advocative ('pro' people), the second is more conflictive in nature ('against' elites). The Green Party of Switzerland focuses mainly on the advocative people-centrism dimension by claiming closeness to Swiss voters or portraying them as unified in their preferences. A cynic could argue that the GPS does not realize its full populist potential because, as an opposition party, the Greens could attack and discredit the ruling political or financial elite even more. This brings us to the right-end of the scale, where

the Swiss SVP represents an exception to the widely held assumption that populist parties may be successful when opposing other parties but lose their unique strength once entering the government (Heinisch 2003). Although the SVP has been part of the government for decades and has been winning the largest voter shares in general elections since 2003 (Ernst et al. 2017b), the party remains extremely critical of political, legal, cultural, and media elites. By being part of the government and simultaneously acting as government's biggest critic, the SVP fulfills a dual role. Its former leader Christoph Blocher, in particular, mastered this double role by successfully promoting himself as challenger of the allegedly corrupt and incapable government, while, simultaneously, being part of the very same government.

During the period under investigation, politicians of the Social Democrats used the fewest populist messages on social media and only emphasized the people-centrism dimension. This low share may be explained by a division of labor with the party's independent youth organization, "Young Socialists of Switzerland (JUSO)". JUSO's online communication typically features multiple populist characteristics, including people-elite antagonism (Luginbühl 2014). Due to the populist communication tendencies of the JUSO, the SP may have strategically decided to adopt a more moderate and non-populist tone on social media – in an effort to target different segments of the electorate with these two complementary approaches.

Our recommendation for future research is to include *more* extreme parties in studies of various countries. Recall that we did not find clear support for the U-curved pattern in France and Italy, but we believe that more updated and extended party samples would produce the effect of "bipolar populism" in these two countries as well. For Switzerland, it would be interesting to incorporate the communication behavior of far-left parties such as the Alternative List (AL) or Swiss Party of Labor (PdA), as well as far-right parties such as the Ticino League (LdT) or the Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG) to further support the validity of the U-curve pattern.

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ARTICLE IV

Populists prefer social media over talk shows. An analysis of populist messages and stylistic elements across six countries

ABSTRACT

For studying populism in a hybrid and high-choice media environment, the comparison of various media channels is especially instructive. We argue that populism-related communication is a combination of key messages (content) and certain stylistic devices (form), and we compare their utilization by a broad range of political actors on Facebook, Twitter, and televised talk shows across six countries (CH, DE, FR, IT, UK, and US). We conducted a content analysis of social media and talk show statements (N = 2067) from 31 parties during a non-election period of three months in 2015. We place special emphasis on stylistic devices and find that they can be grouped into three dimensions – equivalent to three dimensions used for populist key messages. We further find that political parties are generally more inclined to use populism-related communication on Facebook and Twitter than in political talk shows and that both new challenger parties and extreme parties use higher amounts of populist key messages and style elements.

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Populists Prefer Social Media Over Talk Shows: An Analysis of Populist Messages and Stylistic Elements Across Six Countries

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Abstract

For studying populism in a hybrid and high-choice media environment, the comparison of various media channels is especially instructive. We argue that populism-related communication is a combination of key messages (content) and certain stylistic devices (form), and we compare their utilization by a broad range of political actors on Facebook, Twitter, and televised talk shows across six countries (CH, DE, FR, IT, UK, and US). We conducted a content analysis of social media and talk show statements ($N = 2067$) from 31 parties during a nonelection period of 3 months in 2015. We place special emphasis on stylistic devices and find that they can be grouped into three dimensions—equivalent to three dimensions used for populist key messages. We further find that political parties are generally more inclined to use populism-related communication on Facebook and Twitter than in political talk shows and that both new challenger parties and extreme parties use higher amounts of populist key messages and style elements.

Keywords

populist communication, Facebook, Twitter, challenger parties, extreme parties

Today, it has become almost impossible to read the news without noticing a reference to populism. Scholarly interest in this transnational phenomenon has been growing because an increasing number of politicians and parties are apparently resorting to populist communication repertoires. Several studies analyzed the utilization of populist rhetoric (e.g., Wodak, 2015), populist messages (e.g., Rooduijn, 2014), or populist communication styles (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and demonstrated that investigating populist communication is crucial to fully understand the rise of political populism, as populism is mostly reflected in the oral, written, and visual communication of political actors (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017). In a hybrid (Chadwick, 2017) or high choice media environment (van Aelst et al., 2017), politicians have gained new options for action because they have a greater number of communication channels—which differ in their affordances—at their disposal. Hence, it has become increasingly difficult to understand the role of a single medium in isolation (Bode & Vraga, 2017). These difficulties call for a comparative analysis that considers different media systems and different channel types. This type of analysis is especially important in the context of populism because there is conclusive empirical evidence that features of specific media channels influence the amount of populist communication (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017). Our study compares the communicative self-presentation of political actors in three prototypical media channels for populism, Facebook, Twitter, and political talk shows, across six Western democracies. In addition to the particularities of the channels, we investigate whether the characteristics of a political party influence the amount of populist communication. Although populism in Western democracies is often associated with right-wing political actors, several studies with a wider scope have revealed that parties at both edges

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of the political spectrum adopt populist communication (Bernhard, 2016; Ernst et al., 2017; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). In addition to the left/right divide, we are also examining whether younger parties that adopt a challenger position toward the establishment are more likely to use populist communication.

We define populist communication as the communicative representation of the populist ideology (what is being said) and the use of populism-related stylistic elements (how something is being said) by all sorts of political actors. We, therefore, follow a communication-centered approach (Sorensen, 2017) by defining key characteristics—messages and styles—of populist communication. Following Kriesi's (2018) suggestion, we will first translate the key concepts of populist ideology into empirically measurable "key messages." Next, we will examine the "stylistic elements" that politicians use when going popular. Because Kriesi (2018, p. 13) argues that "populist content and populist style tend to go together," we will finally investigate similarities in politicians' use of "key messages" and "stylistic elements."

An important contribution of our study is to identify and systematize stylistic elements that politicians use in a similar way as they utilize populist key messages. In particular, we will determine whether characteristics of the communication channel and properties of a political party influence in similar ways the use of populist key messages and certain style elements. For this purpose, we compare a broad spectrum of political actors on two social media platforms and 12 political talk shows in six Western democracies (CH, DE, UK, US, IT, and FR). We find that (a) a variety of stylistic elements that previous literature has seen as part of populist actors' communication strategy can be condensed to three dimensions—similarly to three ideological dimensions of populist communication, (b) politicians are generally more inclined to use populist key messages and related style elements on Facebook and Twitter than in TV talk shows, and (c) politicians from both new challenger parties and extreme parties use greater amounts of populism-related communication elements than established mainstream parties.

Populist Communication

Populism is a contested concept with a broad variety of different definitions (e.g., Canovan, 1999). Focusing on political actors' self-presentation and their communicative approaches, we can identify two main traditions in the literature, as populist communication has either been defined as an ideology (Mudde, 2004) or a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Engesser, Fazwi, & Larsson (2017) argue that these two traditions are not mutually exclusive and only represent different aspects of populism. Their conceptualization of a populist communication logic distinguishes between four main approaches. First, populist ideology conceives populism as a set of ideas and focuses on the content—the what—of populist communication. Second, populism as a style emphasizes populism as a mode of presentation and focuses on the form and how the content is presented. Third, populism as a political strategy conceives populism as a means to an end and is interested in the strategic motives and aims of populist communication. Fourth, research on populism can focus on actors by analyzing the messengers.

In terms of a starting point, we are building upon foundations of the political science literature that conceptualizes populism as a relational concept with a distinct set of political ideas (Hawkins, 2009; Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). We, therefore, conceive and define populism as a thin ideology. Populism claims that the people have been betrayed by the elites in charge who are abusing their positions of power, and it demands that the sovereignty of the people must be restored. Furthermore, we follow Hawkins (2009) who emphasizes that these basic ideas are expressed with specific discourse patterns, and we follow Wodak (2015, p. 3) who argues that populist political communication always "combines and integrates form and content" by providing "a dynamic mix of substance and style." Some scholars—most notably Moffitt (2016)—have built ideological elements into stylistic definitions of populism. However, this is a proposal that we expressly do not want to follow, because we want to keep the basic ideological components of populist ideas separate from stylistic elements.

A populist vision of democracy basically separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the good people" versus "the bad elite," and postulates the unrestricted sovereignty of the people (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004; Wirth et al., 2016).[1] Following this conceptualization, Mény and Surel (2002) have identified three key notions of populism: glorification of the people (people-centrism), condemnation of corrupt elites (anti-elitism), and claims for the restoration of popular sovereignty (popular sovereignty). When communicated in public, these ideological dimensions are broken down by political actors into nine key messages (Table 1). Previous studies have translated these key messages into empirically measurable categories of quantitative content analysis (see Ernst et al., 2017).

According to Kriesi (2018), the use of these key messages is part of a political strategy that manifests itself in broader communication patterns. In his view, a populist political communication strategy is also expressed by the use of a specific communication style. Kriesi (2018, p. 12) expects this style to be characterized by elements such as "emergency rhetoric," "emotionalization" as well as "assertive/absolutist" and "colloquial" language, among others. His position is fully compatible with Sorensen's (2017) stand that "approaching populism from a communications perspective (. . .) inevitably involves considerations of style as well as ideology" (p. 139). We follow Hofstadter's (2008) definition of a communication style being the way ideas are believed

Table 1. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Key Messages.

Dimension	Populist key message	Underlying ideology	Categories
Anti-Elitism	Discrediting the elite	Elites are corrupt.	Elites are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, and so on. The elite are called names and denied morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, and so on.
	Blaming the elite	Elites are harmful.	Elites are described as a threat/burden, responsible for negative developments/situations, or as having committed mistakes or crimes. Elites are described as not being a source of enrichment or responsible for positive developments/situations.
	Detaching the elite from the people	Elites do not represent the people.	Elites are described as not belonging to the people, not being close to the people, not knowing the people, not speaking for the people, not caring for the people, or not performing everyday actions.
People centrism	Stressing the people's virtues	The people are virtuous.	The people are bestowed with morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, and so on. The people are exempt from being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, and so on.
	Praising the people's achievements	The people are beneficial.	The people are described as being enriched or responsible for a positive development/situation. The people are described as not being a threat/burden, not being responsible for negative developments/situations, nor as having committed mistakes or crimes.
	Stating a monolithic people	The people are homogeneous.	People are described as sharing common feelings, desires, or opinions.
	Demonstrating closeness to the people	The populist represents the people.	The speaker describes himself as belonging to the people, being close to the people, knowing the people, speaking for the people, caring for the people, agreeing with the people, or performing everyday actions. The speaker claims to represent or embody the people.
Restoring sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty	The people are the ultimate sovereign.	The speaker argues for general institutional reforms to grant the people more power by introducing direct-democratic elements or increasing political participation. The speaker argues in favor of granting more power to the people within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).
	Denying elite sovereignty	The elites deprive the people of their sovereignty.	The speaker argues in favor of granting less power to elites within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).

and advocated by a political actor rather than the truth or falsity of the content (Block & Negrine, 2017).

We are interested in finding systematic parallels in the use of populist key messages and the use of certain stylistic elements. We have searched the research literature to identify the communicative stylistic elements attributed to populist actors. We have finally identified seven of them, which we have summarized in Table 2. It is important to make clear that until we have examined these stylistic elements in more detail, we do not yet claim that they are populist in themselves. Following Kriesi (2018), we only say that they can be considered expressions of the same communication strategy that can also lead to the use of populist key messages.

The first style element with an affinity to populism is *negativism.* It refers to the tendency of populist actors to paint society darkly by attributing negative characteristics to the elites or dangerous others or by condemning situations or actions with a negative outcome (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016; Block & Negrine, 2017; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Engesser, Fawzi et al., 2017). Second, populist actors gravitate toward portraying various situations or developments as crises. To employ this *crisis rhetoric*, populist actors usually adopt rhetorical elements of immorality, exaggeration, scandal, emergency, or war. Third, the e*motional tone* style comprises populist actors' tendency to share positive or negative emotions or reveal feelings (Block & Negrine, 2017; Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2013; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Canovan, 1999; Engesser, Fawzi et al., 2017; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017). While most authors stress the importance of negative emotions that are raised against others or elites, positive emotions can be directed to the people or the populist leader. Fourth, *absolutism* describes the affinity of populist actors to paint the society in black and white terms without any shades of gray. The style expresses itself in the use of an assertive tone and a hesitation to use relativizing words in their communication (Bos & Brants, 2014; Engesser, Fawzi et al., 2017; Hawkins, 2009). Fifth, *patriotism* as a populist communication style portrays the tendency of populists to long for a time when everything

Table 2. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populism-Related Style Elements.

Dimension	Stylistic devices	Underlying style element	Categories
Negativity	Negativism	Paint society and its members (part of the people) "in black" by attributing negative characteristics or condemning actions/situations with negative outcome.	Targets are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, racist, and so on or are denied being benevolent, likable, intelligent, credible, loyal, consistent, and so on.
	Crisis rhetoric	Portraying a situation/development as a crisis using exaggerations, emergency rhetoric or declaring a scandal.	Speaker uses rhetorical elements of immorality, exaggeration, scandal, emergency, or war rhetoric.
Emotionality	Emotional tone	Sharing positive and negative emotions or revealing feelings.	Speaker uses emotional language by expressing discrete positive (e.g., happiness, contentment, hope, pride, trust) or negative (e.g., anger, uneasiness, sadness, fear, regret, affection) emotions.
	Absolutism	Using an assertive tone and lacking relativizing words. Tendency to paint world in black and white without any shades of gray.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of absolutism by presenting something as the only conceivable option or as preposterous or unbearable.
	Patriotism	Emphasizing of the superiority of own country by referencing an idealized and utopic heartland.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of patriotism by emphasizing superiority of own country or some obscure heartland.
Sociability	Colloquialism	Preference for a simple, dialect, colloquial, or vulgar language and use of nicknames to reach the ordinary people.	Speaker uses vulgar language or slang, employs sarcasm or rhetorical questions and address targets with nicknames.
	Intimization	Recounting personal and intimate details about personal life.	Targets are described in their predominately personal life by emphasizing their family or love life and making references to personal way of life or leisure activities.

was much better and emphasize the superiority of their own country by employing rhetorical elements referencing an idealized and sometimes utopic vision of the country or heartland (Block & Negrine, 2017; Rydgren, 2017; Taggart, 2000). Sixth, populist actors are prone to reduce complexity by employing a *colloquial* style, which manifests itself in simple, dialect, colloquial, or vulgar language to reach ordinary citizens (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Engesser, Fawzi et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016). Finally, populist actors do not shy away from using an *intimization* style in which they recount personal and intimate details about their personal lives to portray themselves as approachable and down-to-earth politicians (Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Stanyer, 2012).

Overall, we take a communication-centered approach and conceive of populist communication as an outcome of a strategy that uses both ideological key messages and certain stylistic elements (see also Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Krämer, 2014; Stockemer & Barisione, 2017; Wirth et al., 2016). How these two components manifest themselves is an open empirical question that we want to clarify. But Krämer (2017) has already pointed out that there is often a "homology between ideologies and styles" (p. 1305) and that scholars should not refrain from style-based reconstructions of populism—however "thin" they may be. Especially because content and form tend to interfere and interact with one another (Stockemer & Barisione, 2017). By combining both perspectives, we wish to explore similarities in the use of populist key messages and stylistic devices on social media and political talk shows.

Populist Communication on Social Media and Political Talk Shows

In a hybrid media system where new and old media are intertwined and their logics complement each other, political actors no longer rely on a single communication channel (Chadwick, 2017). Instead, they choose a variety of different channels to achieve their communicative goals. Bode and Vraga (2017) argue that studying single media platforms in isolation ignores the reality of the contemporary media system. This argument is especially important because research has demonstrated that the specific characteristics of the communication channel influence the amount of populist communication (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011; Ernst et al., 2017). By investigating populist communication on television and social media, we can gain a more detailed understanding of how the features of a platform affect populist communication. Political talk shows and social media represent two different types of communication channels that suggest differences in the way politicians from different parties and countries use them for populist purposes. What unites these channels is that they offer

politicians favorable opportunities for self-presentation with little to no interference from skeptical, hard-nosed political journalists (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017). They are moreover prototypical channels for populist communication and both Bos and Brants (2014) and Cranmer (2011) conclude, that especially political talk shows offer great opportunity structures for populist communication.

Social media plays a major role in the political communication strategies of contemporary parties (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2013). Especially, Twitter and Facebook have emerged as central media platforms that rival traditional news media in reach and influence (Fisher, Marshall, & McCallum, 2018). The possibility to bypass news journalists and the ability of political actors to communicate directly with their publics increases the chances of successful self-promotion (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2013). This gives us already an idea of why social media networks have transpired as a particularly well-suited channel for populist communication (Ernst et al., 2017).

Four opportunity structures of Facebook and Twitter foster the potential for populist communication: They offer the possibility to establish a close connection to the people, they provide a direct access to the public without journalistic interventions, they can create a feeling of community and recognition among otherwise scattered groups, and they foster the potential for personalization (Ernst et al., 2017).

When comparing the two social media platforms in relation to their potential for populist purposes, Facebook has four advantages over Twitter. First, Facebook offers more reciprocal message exchanges; second, it has higher levels of proximity and the connection between Facebook users is generally more intensive, personal, and intimate; and third, Facebook is not subject to certain character limits, which gives political actors greater opportunity to make their case effectively and elaborately. Finally, due to the different characteristics of users (in terms of education, socioeconomic status, or political interest), Twitter has a stronger professional orientation, and political actors may consider it less suitable for spreading populism (Jacobs & Spierings, 2018). In contrast, Facebook is the platform for ordinary citizens to interact with politicians (Kalsnes, Larsson, & Enli, 2017), which makes it more suitable for populist communication. Schulz (2018) has supported this argument from the audience perspective by showing that populist citizens are more likely to use Facebook as their source of political information, while nonpopulist citizens rather use Twitter for information purposes.

Television talk shows belong to a completely different media category, but can fulfill similar functions for politicians. They are important outlets for the articulation of political ideas (Baym, 2013; Jones, 2010; Kessler & Lachenmaier, 2017) and have a positive effect on viewers' trust in politicians (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016). Like social media, talk shows offer the opportunity to bypass the watchdog journalism more commonly found in hard news programs, offer the possibility of self-presentation, and foster the potential for personalization (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016; Kessler & Lachenmaier, 2017). Political talk shows, therefore, represent another ideal stage for populist communication (Cranmer, 2011) and make the comparison with Facebook and Twitter more meaningful.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aim of this study is twofold. In the first step, we will examine the seven populism-related style elements for their broader underlying dimensions. To examine the relationship between these seven stylistic elements, we examine the following research question:

RQ1: Do populism-related style elements form distinct dimensions?

In a second step, we will investigate whether the characteristics of communication channels and the properties of parties affect the degree of populist communication on social media and political talk shows. Recent research has demonstrated the importance of Facebook and Twitter for populist communication (e.g., Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017; Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Stier, Posch, Bleier, & Strohmaier, 2017). However, these studies lack a comparison of different media channels. In previous research, political talk shows were found to contain the highest level of populist communication compared with other arenas (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011). Yet, none of these studies compared the amount of populist communication to social media. We argue that Facebook and Twitter are even more advantageous for spreading populist communication than talk shows because they allow politicians to circumvent traditional gatekeepers completely; they further allow for better message targeting and personalization and for the establishment of reciprocal relationships and a more direct line to their followers (Ernst et al., 2017). Hence, the first hypothesis to be tested is

H1: The proportion of populist key messages and related style elements are higher on Facebook and Twitter than on political talk shows.

In addition, the properties of political parties are of special interest to this study. The so-called challenger parties are a particularly relevant party category because they are often perceived as a threat to the party establishment (Meguid, 2005) and assumed to use populist communication to generate attention (Kriesi, 2014). Throughout the various crisis cycles since the 1980s, new challenger parties from both the left and the right have emerged and gained success in many Western democracies (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016; Müller-Rommel, 1998). Kriesi (2014) argues that these

new challenger parties may be perceived as a threat to the establishment because they highlight problems that have been neglected by mainstream parties, mobilize outside of the electoral channels, and resort to creative, innovative forms of protest communication. New right- and left-wing challenger parties can thus be expected to blame the elites and complain about a neglect of the people's true concerns (Kriesi, 2014). Hence, these parties may rely on populist communication to improve their electoral chances (Betz, 2002) and their media visibility (Mazzoleni, 2008). These assumptions are supported by a longitudinal study from Switzerland that found that new parties—independent from their ideological stance—relied on high levels of populist communication in party advertising and press releases during their initial "challenger phase" (Weber, 2017). We would like to examine this mechanism on a broader empirical basis and propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Challenger parties use a greater proportion of populist key messages and related style elements than established parties.

Party extremism is also expected to influence the amount of populist communication. Populism is often too quickly associated with right-wing parties. However, populism should be considered as a latent or thin ideology (Hawkins, 2009; Stanley, 2008) that, due to its "thinness," can be combined with a variety of "thick" host ideologies (such as socialism, authoritarianism, nationalism) that add more specific content to it. Although right- and left-leaning parties differ in their ideologies, party programs, and social basis, they have several characteristics in common that are related to populist communication. At least in Western Europe, they emerged in recent decades, often compensate for their small-sized party organization with large-sized communication offensives, tend to remain opposition parties, and share a protest attitude against established parties, politics, and state structures (Müller-Rommel, 1998). Moreover, research has substantiated that parties at the fringes of the political spectrum are more inclined than moderate parties to challenge the current government, attack elites, and glorify the people in their communication within party manifestos (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017), press releases (Bernhard, 2016), and on social media (Ernst et al., 2017). Against this background, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Extreme parties use a greater proportion of populist key messages and related style elements than moderate parties.

Method

We content-analyzed populist key messages and related style elements used by 110 politicians on political talk shows and social media across six countries in 2015 using a semiautomatic coding program. These channels were chosen because they mostly lack journalistic interference and allow a relatively unfiltered view of politicians' communication.

Sample

To test our hypotheses, we need to construct a sample of politicians from different political parties who appear on talk shows and social media using populist messages and stylistic devices during our investigation period. To explore populist communication as a transnational phenomenon (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Moffitt, 2016), these politicians need to come from different countries. This requires a three-step procedure: we first identified relevant countries, then sampled the relevant political talk shows and listed all appearing politicians, and finally collected the social media material of these politicians. By applying such an individual matching procedure on the microlevel of politicians, the study ensures the comparability of communication on both channel types and thus avoids ecological fallacies.

In the first step, we selected six countries (CH, DE, IT, FR, UK, and US). By performing all analyses under six different macrosocial conditions, our multinational comparative design serves as a robustness check for the meaningfulness of our findings. In other words, our conclusions on which media types and party types are more susceptible to populist communication thus gain more reach and validity. The country sample provides sufficient variability regarding political systems (parliamentary vs. presidential, representative vs. directional, consensus vs. majoritarian systems), party characteristics (strong vs. weak populist parties), and consumer preferences for political information sources (Aalberg et al., 2017; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Kleis Nielsen, 2017).

In the second step, we identified two influential political talk shows per country (see Table A in online appendix) and recorded four episodes of each show during a 2-month period of routine news without national elections from April through May 2015. The twelve selected talk shows all air weekly and achieve high market shares in their segment. They are all primarily political in focus, follow a roundtable format, have a length of approximately 60 min,[2] and regularly invite politicians as guests. The number of politicians ranged from one to five per show; we coded only their statements and disregarded those made by the moderator, nonpolitical guests, or members of the audience. This led to a total of 1579 statements by 110 political actors across the 48 taped programs.

In the third step, we collected the social media material (Facebook posts and Tweets) of all politicians[3] who appeared on the talk shows during the study period.[4] We considered only Tweets and Facebook posts that included direct statements of the politician and were longer than eight characters. Simple Retweets and Tweets or Facebook posts including only pictures, links, or videos were excluded from the analysis. We drew a random sample of 50 social media statements per politician ($N = 5099$).

Out of the initial sample, we kept only those statements that included a veritable statement by a politician and expressed either a political position, an elaboration on a political issue, or an evaluation, or an attribution of a target actor ($N=2130$). We further excluded politicians with less than five statements in total or no clear party affiliation. This led to a final sample of $N=969$ talk show statements, $N=734$ Facebook posts, and $N=364$ Tweets by 98 politicians from 31 political parties.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is a single statement made by a politician. It can contain a key message and/or a stylistic device. In the terminology of our codebook, statements are made by speakers (i.e., politicians) about a target actor or an issue. A target actor is the object of a politician's characterization or evaluation and may include politicians, members of the elite, or the people. A political issue refers to the thematic context of the statement.

A team of intensively trained student coders reached acceptable levels of reliability. The average Brennan and Prediger's kappa across all messages and styles is .91 (see Table B in online appendix).

Operationalization

Populism-Related Communication. The nine populist key messages and the seven stylistic devices were gathered based on the instructions given in a codebook (for details on the categories used see Tables 1 and 2). For each category, we recorded whether the variable was present in a statement. A key message or stylistic device was considered present if at least one of the related categories was coded. The dependent variable, populism-related communication, was present if at least one of the nine populist key messages or seven stylistic elements were observed.

Party Categories. The 98 politicians belong to 31 political parties. Table 3 depicts the number of politicians per party (for further details see Table C in online appendix). To determine the degree of party extremism, we assigned each party its respective Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) score (Table 3). We had to rate American and some Italian parties ourselves because the CHES did not include them (Polk et al., 2017). For each party score, we subtracted the theoretical center of the scale (–5) and took the absolute value to obtain a measure of party extremism. We also recorded the age of each party. Since most challenger parties emerged in recent decades (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016; Müller-Rommel, 1998; Weber, 2017), we coded all parties founded after 1980 as challenger parties. Furthermore, two dummies for Facebook and Twitter (vs. political talk shows) were calculated.

Findings

Sample Description

In total, 38% of all statements contain at least one populism-related communication element. Overall, populist key messages and stylistic devices are weakly correlated ($r=.173$, $p<.01$), and the style elements (31.3%) are used significantly more, $t(2066)=17.35$, $p<.001$, than populist key messages (13.6%). Anti-elitist key messages (9.6%) are more prominent than people-centrist key messages (3.3%). Key messages about restoring sovereignty are almost absent (0.9%) in politicians' communication on social media and talk shows. Negativity (19.9%) and emotionality (12.2%) are commonly used style elements, whereas sociability (4.8%) is only present in every 20th statement.

Research Question and Hypotheses

In a first step, we conducted a principal component factor analysis with the seven style elements (varimax rotation, Kaiser normalization). The factor analysis identified three distinct dimensions (51.4% explained variance, Bartlett's test of sphericity $=\chi^2(21)=282.3$, $p<.001$) without any substantial cross-loadings (Table 4). *Negativity* comprises negativism and crisis rhetoric; *emotionality* includes emotional tone, absolutism, and patriotism; and *sociability* is composed of colloquialism and intimization. We consider this finding an important empirical contribution to the literature that discusses stylistic devices as part of populist actors' communication strategy. It provides the basis for our further analyses.

To test our three hypotheses, we conducted 12 multilevel models (Table 5 for an overview) with maximum-likelihood estimation (ML). In Models 1 to 4, populism-related communication is the dependent variable, which means the use of at least one populist key message and/or at least one style element. Due to the rather weak correlation of populist key messages and stylistic elements, we calculated eight additional models to test the effects for both components separately. In Models 5 to 8, the dependent variable is the use of any populist key message and in Models 9 to 12, the dependent variable is the use of any style element. Units of analysis are statements made by politicians on Twitter, Facebook, or political talk shows. These statements by politicians are nested in political party properties. Hence, the independent variables for Hypothesis 1 (social media) are located at the first level, while the independent variables for Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 (challenger parties and extremism) are located at the second level. Before assessing the multilevel models, we determined whether it is useful to let the intercepts vary across parties. If we compare the respective baseline models with Model 1 ($\chi^2(1)=46.26$, $p<.001$), Model 5 ($\chi^2(1)=42.06$, $p<.001$), and Model 9 ($\chi^2(1)=38.23$, $p<.001$) we can conclude that in all three models, the intercepts vary

Table 3. Overview of Political Party Sample.

Country	Party information	Political stance				
		Left	Moderate Left	Center	Moderate Right	Right
CH	Political party	GPS	SP	CVP	FDP	SVP
	CHES score	1.88	2.13	5.5	6.88	8.25
	Founding year	1983	1888	1912	2009	1971
	Number of represented politicians	3	4	3	3	7
	Populism-related communication score	0.28	0.30	0.24	0.26	0.42
	Political party			GLP		
	CHES score			5.25		
	Founding year			2007		
	Number of represented politicians			1		
	Populism-related communication score			0.32		
DE	Political party	Linke	SPD	CDU	FDP	AfD
	CHES score	1.23	3.77	5.92	6.54	8.92
	Founding year	2007	1963	1945	1948	2013
	Number of represented politicians	2	3	4	1	1
	Populism-related communication score	0.50	0.40	0.10	0.10	0.42
	Political party		Gruenen		CSU	
	CHES score		3.62		7.23	
	Founding year		1993		1945	
	Number of represented politicians		3		1	
	Populism-related communication score		0.47		0.13	
FR	Political party		PS			
	CHES score		3.83			
	Founding year		1969			
	Number of represented politicians		3			
	Populism-related communication score		0.25			
IT	Political party		PD	SC	FI	LN
	CHES score		3.57	5.43	6.71	8.86
	Founding year		2007	2013	1994	1998
	Number of represented politicians		11	1	1	2
	Populism-related communication score		0.37	0.44	0.33	0.63
	Political party		RI	M5S	FdI	
	CHES score		3	4.67	7.86	
	Founding year		2001	2009	2012	
	Number of represented politicians		1	1	1	
	Populism-related communication score		0.50	0.44	0.38	
	Political party			IdV		
	CHES score			5		
	Founding year			1998		
	Number of represented politicians			1		
	Populism-related communication score			0.40		
UK	Political party	Green	Lab	LibDem	Cons	UKIP
	CHES score	1.86	3.57	4.86	7	9.14
	Founding year	1990	1900	1988	1934	1993
	Number of represented politicians	1	4	4	5	3
	Populism-related communication score	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.45	0.55
	Political party		SNP			
	CHES score		3			
	Founding year		1934			
	Number of represented politicians		3			
	Populism-related communication score		0.28			
	Political party		Plaid			
	CHES score		3.25			
	Founding year		1925			
	Number of represented politicians		1			
	Populism-related communication score		0.79			

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Country	Party information	Political stance				
		Left	Moderate Left	Center	Moderate Right	Right
US	Political party		D		R	
	CHES score		3		7	
	Founding year		1828		1854	
	Number of represented politicians		9		8	
	Populism-related communication score		0.27		0.36	

Note. Gray background stands for challenger parties. For RI, IdV, D, and R no CHES score exist. We placed these parties ourselves and assigned them an individual extremism score. The populist-related communication score (range = 0-1) is based on both messages and styles across social media and political talk shows.

Table 4. Factor Analysis of Populism-Related Style Elements.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	Negativity	Emotionality	Sociability
Negativism	**0.78**	−0.08	0.16
Crisis rhetoric	**0.73**	0.20	−0.07
Emotional tone	−0.10	**0.66**	0.09
Absolutism	0.05	**0.63**	−0.02
Patriotism	0.17	**0.57**	−0.05
Colloquialism	−0.11	−0.02	**0.79**
Intimization	0.19	0.05	**0.70**
Self-value	1.23	1.21	1.16
Variance explained (%)	17.50	17.33	16.60
Total variance (%)	51.42		

Note. Rotated factormatrix (principal component factor analysis, varimax rotation), KMO = .56, Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2(21) = 282.3$, $p < .001$, $N = 2065$.

significantly across parties and significantly improved the model fits.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that populism-related communication by various political actors is higher on social media than political talk shows. To test this hypothesis, we added two fixed effects of Twitter (dummy) and Facebook (dummy) to the model. A model comparison demonstrated that the fit of the models significantly increased for Model 2 ($\chi^2(1) = 49.60$, $p < .001$), Model 6 ($\chi^2(1) = 12.14$, $p < .01$), and Model 10 ($\chi^2(1) = 50.43$, $p < .001$). We find clear support for this hypothesis. Model 2 shows that statements on Facebook ($\beta = .17$, $t(2035) = 7.09$, $p < .001$) and Twitter ($\beta = .08$, $t(2035) = 3.17$, $p < .001$) significantly predict populism-related communication and demonstrates that the degree of populism-related communication is higher on both social media platforms than political talk shows. This pattern is identical for style elements (Twitter: $\beta = .08$, $t(2035) = 3.29$, $p < .001$; Facebook: $\beta = .17$, $t(2035) = 7.16$, $p < .001$ Model 10) in isolation as well. For populist key messages, we only find a significant effect for Facebook ($\beta = .08$, $t(2035) = 3.45$, $p < .001$). Key messages on Twitter, however, are not more common than in political talk shows ($\beta = .02$, $t(2035) = 0.66$, *ns*). If we compare the two social media platforms, we can conclude that Facebook is the stronger predictor and that political actors tend to prefer Facebook for their populism-related communication.

Hypothesis 2 argued that challenger parties use more populism-related communication than established mainstream parties. To test this hypothesis, we added the challenger party dummy as another fixed effect to the models. Again, model comparisons revealed that the fit of all models significantly improved for Model 3 ($\chi^2(1) = 7.45$, $p < .01$), Model 7 ($\chi^2(1) = 4.95$, $p < .05$), and Model 11 ($\chi^2(1) = 10.35$, $p < .001$). In Model 3, we find support for this hypothesis and show that challenger parties use more *populism-related communication* ($\beta = .11$, $t(29) = 2.95$, $p < .01$) than established parties. We identified the same pattern for populist key messages in Model 7 ($\beta = .09$, $t(29) = 2.27$, $p < .05$) and style elements in Model 11 ($\beta = .12$, $t(29) = 3.70$, $p < .001$).

To test whether party extremism positively influences the amount of populism-related communication, which is postulated in Hypothesis 3, we added extremism as a fourth additional fixed effect. Model comparisons reveal that for model 4 with the combined use of populist key messages and stylistic elements as the dependent variable, the fit increased significantly ($\chi^2(1) = 5.08$, $p < .05$), meaning that parties with high extremism scores use populism-related communication more often ($\beta = 0.08$, $t(28) = 2.42$, $p < .05$; model 4) than moderate parties with low extremism scores. For the separate use of populist key messages ($\chi^2(1) = 2.85$, $p = .09$; model 8) or stylistic devices ($\chi^2(1) = 2.64.14$, $p = .06$; model 12), we only find somewhat weaker effects. The influence of party extremism on the separate use of either populist key messages ($\beta = 0.06$, $t(28) = 1.81$, $p = .08$; model 8) or stylistic devices ($\beta = 0.06$, $t(28) = 1.97$, $p = .06$; model 12) leans toward significance, but narrowly missed the standard p-value threshold. In sum, we only find partial support for hypothesis 3. Party extremism results in a significantly higher use of the combination of populism-related communication; for messages and style elements separately however, we can only report a trend.

All 12 multilevel models present clear support for the three postulated hypotheses, demonstrating that parties are generally more inclined to use populism-related communication on Facebook and Twitter than in talk shows and that new

Table 5. Multilevel Model of Populism-Related Communication.

	Populism-related communication				Populist key messages				Populism-related style elements			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*	β *SE*
(Intercept)	−0.013 0.050	−0.003 0.044	0.018 0.042	−0.007 0.033	−0.008 0.044	−0.005 0.042	−0.015 0.040	−0.008 0.037	−0.003 0.050	0.006 0.043	−0.007 0.033	−0.003 0.030
Twitter		0.076 0.024 ***	0.078 0.024 ***	0.077 0.024 **		0.016 0.024	0.017 0.024	0.016 0.024		0.079 0.024 ***	0.082 0.024 ***	0.079 0.024 ***
Facebook		0.169 0.024 ***	0.171 0.024 ***	0.172 0.024 ***		0.083 0.024 ***	0.084 0.024 ***	0.024 0.022 ***		0.171 0.024 ***	0.175 0.024 ***	0.174 0.023 ***
Challenger party			0.113 0.038 **	0.102 0.033 **			0.089 0.039 *	0.081 0.036 *			0.121 0.033 ***	0.115 0.030 ***
Extremism				0.078 0.032 *				0.064 0.035 †				0.058 0.030 †
AIC	5824.63	5779.04	5775.39	5770.52	5828.83	5820.68	5817.73	5816.88	5832.66	5786.24	5819.73	5776.24
BIC	5841.53	5807.21	5814.83	5809.95	5845.73	5848.85	5851.54	5856.32	5849.56	5814.41	5859.17	5815.68
Log likelihood	−2909.32	−2884.52	−2880.70	−2878.26	−2911.42	−2905.34	−2902.87	−2901.44	−2913.33	−2888.12	−2902.87	−2881.12
Level 1 *N (statements)*	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067	2067
Level 2 *N (parties)*	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.
***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$. †$p < .10$.

challenger parties as well as extreme parties use higher amounts of populism-related communication.[5]

Discussion and Conclusion

In a communications approach, populist ideology and style elements are considered inextricably intertwined, but scholars need to keep them analytically distinct and analyze them with separate empirical measures. We are aware that some researchers such as Moffitt (2016) have incorporated ideological elements into the stylistic definition of populism, but we deliberately do not follow this approach. We understand populist communication as the outcome of a political strategy that uses both ideological key messages and certain stylistic elements. We have developed systematic operationalizations for messages (content) and styles (form) and examined them with a content analysis that takes into account different countries, communication channels and party types.

We argued that populism as an ideology consists of three programmatic components that are communicated publicly through nine key messages. In a similar way, we have examined stylistic elements of a "going popular" strategy and found that they can also be grouped into three dimensions: negativity, emotionality, and sociability. This deserves attention because the research of style elements is still in development while the research of ideological key messages is already better established. We have placed particular emphasis on stylistic elements because politicians have to convey their messages through media channels and package them effectively. If the stylistic elements we examined were used equally by all political parties (including mainstream parties), one could not assume a close relationship to populism. But our results indicate a different pattern. We find that politicians who use ideological key messages most frequently (namely, those of challenger parties and extreme parties) also use these stylistic elements most often. This is what we had anticipated, because we have primarily examined those stylistic elements the previous literature had attributed to populist politicians. This important finding leads us to conclude that we are dealing here with populism-related or even populist stylistic elements.

We further theorized that Facebook and Twitter are more susceptible to the use of populism-related communication than talk shows because social media makes it easier for politicians to bypass the traditional media, to tailor their messages to their target groups, and to present themselves as close to the people. With regard to political parties, we argue

that it is more likely that young challenger parties as well as extreme left- and right-wing parties communicate in a populist manner.

Our study further demonstrates—on the basis of six countries—that parties are generally more inclined to use populism-related communication on social media than in political talk shows. By comparing the three different media channels, we corroborate that populism-related communication is indeed connected to Facebook and Twitter and that the advantages of social media to bypass gatekeepers and disseminate messages without interference are beneficial to populist communication in general. This is especially true for Facebook and confirms previous empirical evidence that Twitter is less suitable for populist communication compared to Facebook (Jacobs & Spierings, 2018). These results provide the first empirical evidence for the theoretical assumption, that online opportunity structures and populist communication logic interact (Engesser et al., 2017). The channel comparison is significant in all investigated countries except for the United States. The difference between social media and talk shows in populism-related communication by Republicans and Democrats is not significant, and politicians of the Democratic Party such as Bernie Sanders or Claire McCaskill tend to use more populism on television. However, Republicans in general and especially politicians such as John Boehner and Newt Gingrich are fully in line with our results and spread their populism-related communication mainly via social media. However, compared to European talk shows, American shows tend to offer more liberty and less journalistic interference, presenting opportunities for political actors to employ populist communication. Overall, these factors thus point to a communication culture in U.S. talk shows that is as beneficial for populist communication as social media.

At the party level, we find evidence that new challenger parties, and to a somewhat lesser extent also parties at the margins of the political spectrum, use more populism-related communication. It is not only right-wing parties such as Swiss SVP, German AfD, Italian Lega Nord, or UKIP, but also left-wing parties such as the German Linke or British Green party that make ample use of populist communication elements (Tables 3 and 5). For challenger parties, we find a predisposition toward populism in all types of statements (Models 4, 8, and 12 of Table 5), for extreme parties most strongly in statements that combine key messages with style elements (Model 4 of Table 5). We thus confirm earlier studies on the communication repertoire of extreme parties (see also Bernhard, 2016; Ernst et al., 2017; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017), but would like to call for future studies to pay more attention to the separate use of key messages and style elements (because we found weaker effects there). We find the strongest use of populism-related communication, incidentally, for those parties to which both the characterization "extreme party" and the characterization "new challenger party" apply at the same time (e.g., German Left, Lega Nord, UKIP). But there are also many counter examples. The Swiss SVP is a good example of a party that has a high extremism score, but has been established in Switzerland for a long time and still relies strongly on populism-related communication. The British Liberal Democrats, German Greens, or the Italian Five Star Movement are excellent examples of challenger parties, but have only a moderate degree of extremism, and yet use high levels of populism in their communication.[6] Overall, these examples demonstrate that while commonly labeled populist parties are challenger and extreme parties at the same time, political parties holding only one of the properties also employ a high degree of populism on social media and talk shows. This confirms our argument that extreme position and challenger status are two independent properties that are separate explanatory factors for populist communication.

Some limitations must be considered. First, due to the sampling procedure, the study only includes politicians who appeared in political talk shows. Even though most of these politicians have active Twitter and/or Facebook accounts, the sample does not include politicians who are not regular talk show guests and therefore rely heavily on their social media communication. This sample strategy excludes social media affine politicians that willingly circumvent either tradition elite media (e.g., Trump) or political outsiders that are not able to find a stage in mainstream media. A sample including such politicians might find even stronger support for the argument that social media "beats" political talk shows. Another limitation is the rather low sample size in terms of countries and parties; the findings represent a specific sample and any generalizations must be drawn carefully. Since the party sample includes many more moderate center parties than extreme ones, it would be desirable to further investigate far left- and right-wing parties. The sample for France is especially problematic because it is only represented by the French Socialist Party. In the eight episodes of Le Grand Jury and Le Grand Journal, politicians from other parties were not invited.[7] Including further key French parties such as "Front National," "Left Front," "The Republicans," or "La République En Marche!" could improve the findings for the French context. A final limitation concerns the lack of any national elections during the routine time period. Populist communication could be different during elections. In particular, the debates and discussions on political talk shows might be enriched and loaded with more populist communication elements. Future studies should strive to sample both routine periods and election campaigns and include a broader sample of countries and parties to compare populist communication across these different modes of operation.

In conclusion, the study at hand contributes to populist communication scholarship in several ways. It integrates the two diverging perspectives on populist ideology and populist style and identifies three populist style dimensions that are of heuristic value for further research on populist styles. It further establishes that social media is more useful for disseminating populism-related communication than talk shows—contesting previous studies that identified the

importance of talk shows. Finally, the study finds support across countries and media platforms that parties still fighting for their place and parties positioning themselves at the polar ends of the political spectrum show the highest tendencies to use populist communication. Future research should follow a communication-centered approach and investigate the broad political spectrum. Furthermore, it is crucial to differentiate between various media channels. A next logical step would thus be to investigate and compare the populist communication by parties on social media and political talk shows with their representation in the traditional news media (print and TV) or online news.

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Notes

1. We are not including the exclusion of out-groups as a defining feature of populist communication as this is rather linked only to radical right-wing populism (Rooduijn, 2014).
2. Italian Servizio Pubblico and Ballarò are an exception with an airtime of approximately 170 min.
3. From the 110 identified politicians, only 15 had no verified Twitter or Facebook account. In the final analysis, only four politicians had no verified account.
4. We extended the study period to the whole year for politicians who had less than 100 Tweets or Facebook posts.
5. We run the models as an additional robustness check including the six countries as another random effect on the third level in the models and could replicate the same effects for all 12 models.
6. The party using the most populism in their communication—the Welsh Plaid Cymru Party—is an exceptional case. With a CHES score of 3.25, it has a rather moderate extremism score. As it was founded in 1925 and has been part of the U.K. parliament since 1966, Plaid Cymru cannot be considered an extreme or challenger party. However, the results must be interpreted with caution because this party is only represented by its party leader, Leanne Wood, in our sample. Her tendency to use populism-related communication in almost 80% of all her statements may be related to her role advocating the Welsh independence and her critical stance against the U.K. government.
7. One exception is the independent Robert Ménard, who we had to exclude from the analysis because of his nonexistent party affiliation.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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ARTICLE V

Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore favorable opportunity structures for populist communication of politicians in Western democracies. We analyze the content and style of 2,517 statements from 103 politicians from six countries (France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States) who differ in their party affiliation (populist versus nonpopulist) and hierarchical position (backbencher vs. frontbencher). To learn more about their media strategies and chances of success, we investigate four communication channels (Facebook, Twitter, talk shows, and news media) that systematically differ in their degree of journalistic intervention and examine fourteen often-raised topics that differ in their suitability for populist mobilization. Our content analysis shows the highest probability of populist communication comes from (1) members of populist parties and (2) backbenchers who address (3) mobilizable issues in (4) social media or newspaper articles. We conclude by explaining why populists have become so successful in getting their messages into newspapers.

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Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore favorable opportunity structures for populist communication of politicians in Western democracies. We analyze the content and style of 2,517 statements from 103 politicians from six countries (France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States) who differ in their party affiliation (populist versus nonpopulist) and hierarchical position (backbencher vs. frontbencher). To learn more about their media strategies and chances of success, we investigate four communication channels (Facebook, Twitter, talk shows, and news media) that systematically differ in their degree of journalistic intervention and examine fourteen often-raised topics that differ in their suitability for populist mobilization. Our content analysis shows the highest probability of populist communication comes from (1) members of populist parties and (2) backbenchers who address (3) mobilizable issues in (4) social media or newspaper articles. We conclude by explaining why populists have become so successful in getting their messages into newspapers.

Keywords

populist issues, populist actors, backbenchers, Facebook, Twitter

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The rapid diffusion of new communication technologies in a hybrid media system are reshaping political communication environments (Chadwick 2017). Politicians no longer rely on a single medium to communicate their messages; rather, they use a range of channels, including print media, television programs, and social media. This is particularly relevant in the field of populist communication, as studies have shown that the characteristics of communication channels have an influence on how much populism can be expected in them (e.g., Bos and Brants 2014; Cranmer 2011).

We aim with this study to determine to what extent the proportion of populist communication adjusts with regard to different communication channels, issues and attributes of a political speaker. We believe that this will tell us something about what media strategies populists use and what chances of success they have in each case. Empirical studies so far have identified political TV talk shows as the most favorable arena for disseminating populist messages (Bos and Brants 2014; Cranmer 2011). We strive to go beyond these studies and ask whether the talk show "bonus" still holds true in the age of social media. Furthermore, we would like to inquire which additional favorable factors can be identified. In addition to the *type of channel*, we would like to test whether *type of issue* and *type of politician* also play a role. Regarding *channels*, we will distinguish between those with high and those with low journalistic interference; regarding *issues*, we will distinguish between those with high and those with low populist affinity; regarding *politicians*, we will distinguish between (1) members of populist and nonpopulist parties and (2) leading and ordinary party officials.

To determine to what extent these differentiations have an influence on the extent and nature of mediated populist communication, we analyzed the content and style of statements of 103 politicians from six countries (France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States) while addressing fourteen issues in three types of media genres (print, television, and social networks). The theoretical framing of this study can be described as a combination of a communication-centered approach to populism (Sorensen 2017) with a discursive opportunity approach (Koopmans and Olzak 2004). Our findings allow us to make predictions for a larger number of Western countries as to which politicians will most likely make populist statements on which topics and on which media channels. While most of our theoretical expectations were confirmed, one finding hit us unexpectedly. It concerns the favorable role of newspapers, and we will use the concluding section of this article to offer explanations.

Populist Communication

Although populism is a highly contested concept, a growing consensus describes populism in ideational terms and conceptualizes it as a *set of ideas* (Hawkins 2009; Kaltwasser and Taggart 2016; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). Based upon this, we conceive populism as a *thin ideology* that separates society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the good people" versus "the bad elite," and postulates the unrestricted sovereignty of the people (Abts and Rummens 2007; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Mudde 2007; Wirth et al. 2016).

In addition to understanding populism as a thin ideology, scholars have conceptualized populism as a communication style (Jagers and Walgrave 2007), a political style (Moffitt 2016), or a political strategy (Weyland 2001). We follow Engesser et al.'s (2017) argument that these notions are not mutually exclusive and only represent different aspects of populism. Their conceptualization of a populist communication logic distinguishes between four main approaches. First, populist ideology conceives populism as a set of ideas and focuses on the *content*—the what—of populist communication. Second, populism as a style emphasizes populism as a mode of presentation and focuses on the *form* and how the content is presented. Third, populism as a political strategy conceives populism as a means to an end and is interested in the strategic *motives and aims* of populist communication. Fourth, research on populism can focus on actors by analyzing the *messengers*.

In our understanding, the ideology of populism cannot be communicated without stylistic elements. Core characteristics of populism empirically manifest themselves in both content and form, as the *co-occurrence* of ideological expression and communication style (Bracciale and Martella 2017; Krämer 2017; Kriesi 2018; Sorensen 2017). This means that we expect political actors to express their populist ideology in the content of their statements while using associated style elements to emphasize their overall points and themes further.

Populism consists of three basis dimensions as an ideology: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring popular sovereignty (Wirth et al. 2016). Communicators will break down these core dimensions into more concrete "key messages" when conveying these concepts to the public. These messages are summarized in Table 1.

The styles of populist communication are also underpinned by three dimensions: negativity, emotionality, and sociability. For these newer findings on style, we refer to a study by Ernst et al. (2018). The authors had identified these three dimensions by means of a factor analysis after examining the frequency of seven more concrete "style elements" in statements made by politicians from several Western democracies. Table 2 shows both the style dimensions and the underlying style elements. Ernst et al. (2018) first identified and justified these seven populist style elements theoretically with a thorough review of the relevant research literature. In their subsequent empirical analysis, they demonstrated that the same politicians who used ideological key messages were also those who used the style elements listed in Table 2.

We build on the consensus emerging in the recent research literature that populist political communication should be regarded as a combination of the use of ideological key messages and accompanying style elements (see de Vreese et al. 2018; Kriesi 2018; Sorensen 2017). In accordance with the theoretical arguments put forward there, we define a statement as populist if it combines at least one ideological "key message" and one populist "style element." The separate use of populist key messages or style elements is—in our admittedly very strict understanding—not sufficient to classify a statement as fully populist. However, as empirical studies have shown that populist communication often occurs in a fragmented form (Ernst et al. 2017; Esser et al. 2017), not all three ideological and all three style dimensions must be represented in one single

Table 1. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Key Messages.

Dimension	Populist Key Message	Underlying Ideology	Categories
Anti-Elitism	Discrediting the elite	Elites are corrupt.	Elites are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc. The elite are called names and denied morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc.
	Blaming the elite	Elites are harmful.	Elites are described as a threat/burden, responsible for negative developments/ situations, or as having committed mistakes or crimes. Elites are described as not being a source of enrichment or responsible for positive developments/situations.
	Detaching the elite from the people	Elites do not represent the people.	Elites are described as not belonging to the people, not being close to the people, not knowing the people, not speaking for the people, not caring for the people, or not performing everyday actions.
People-Centrism	Stressing the people's virtues	The people are virtuous.	The people are bestowed with morality, charisma, credibility, intelligence, competence, consistency, etc. The people are exempt from being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, extremist, racist, undemocratic, etc.
	Praising the people's achievements	The people are beneficial.	The people are described as being enriched or responsible for a positive development/ situation. The people are described as not being a threat/burden, not being responsible for negative developments/situations, nor as having committed mistakes or crimes.
	Stating a monolithic people	The people are homogenous.	People are described as sharing common feelings, desires, or opinions.
	Demonstrating closeness to the people	The populist represents the people.	The speaker describes himself as belonging to the people, being close to the people, knowing the people, speaking for the people, caring for the people, agreeing with the people, or performing everyday actions. The speaker claims to represent or embody the people.
Restoring Sovereignty	Demanding popular sovereignty	The people are the ultimate sovereign.	The speaker argues for general institutional reforms to grant the people more power by introducing direct-democratic elements or increasing political participation. The speaker argues in favor of granting more power to the people within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).
	Denying elite sovereignty	The elites deprive the people of their sovereignty.	The speaker argues in favor of granting less power to elites within the context of a specific issue (e.g., election, immigration, security).

Table 2. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Populist Communication Styles.

Dimension	Populist Style Elements	Underlying Style Element	Categories
Negativity	Negativism	Paint society and its members (part of the people) "in black" by attributing negative characteristics or condemning actions/ situations with negative outcome.	Targets are accused of being malevolent, criminal, lazy, stupid, racist, and so on or are denied being benevolent, likable, intelligent, credible, loyal, consistent, etc.
	Crisis rhetoric	Portraying a situation/ development as a crisis using exaggerations, emergency rhetoric, or declaring a scandal.	Speaker uses rhetorical elements of immorality, exaggeration, scandal, emergency, or war rhetoric.
Emotionality	Emotional tone	Sharing positive and negative emotions or revealing feelings.	Speaker uses emotional language by expressing discrete positive (e.g., happiness, contentment, hope, pride, trust) or negative (e.g., anger, uneasiness, sadness, fear, regret, affection) emotions.
	Absolutism	Using an assertive tone and lacking relativizing words. Tendency to paint world in black and white without any shades of gray.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of absolutism by presenting something as the only conceivable option or as preposterous or unbearable.
	Patriotism	Emphasizing of the superiority of own country by referencing an idealized and utopic heartland.	Speaker uses rhetorical figure of patriotism by emphasizing superiority of own country or some obscure heartland.
Sociability	Colloquialism	Preference for a simple, dialect, colloquial, or vulgar language and use of nicknames to reach the ordinary people.	Speaker uses vulgar language or slang, employs sarcasm or rhetorical questions and address targets with nicknames.
	Intimization	Recounting personal and intimate details about personal life.	Targets are described in their predominately personal life by emphasizing their family or love life and making references to personal way of life or leisure activities.

statement. We expect all dimensions of populist communication to be represented only in the long term of the continuous communication of a politician—not in every single speech act.

Favorable Opportunity Structures for the Dissemination of Populist Communication

The theory of discursive opportunity structures assumes that the actors involved in media discourse will choose the most favorable options for action and communication to achieve their goals. Actors include politicians and journalists; their goals include visibility, resonance, public support, and legitimacy (Koopmans and Olzak 2004). We focus on the perspective of politicians and first discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various media channels regarding their suitability for the dissemination of populist communication. In the next step, we discuss the relevance of more and less suitable thematic contexts; in a third step, we look at different groups of politicians with respect to their probability of using populist communication.

Populist Affinity of Certain Channels

For populists, politics is a direct and nonmediated expression of the general will of the people (Mudde 2007). For this reason, they consider channels on which they can communicate in a direct and nonmediated way to be a favorable opportunity. This varies across channels. According to Paletz' (2002) theory of media interventionism, Twitter and Facebook are regarded as channels *without journalistic interference*; rather, they focus on direct interaction, content distribution among users, and algorithmic connectivity. For Paletz, political talk shows are examples of *medium journalistic interference*, since communication control is shared between host and guest. The dialogical format offers politicians the opportunity to present themselves, but journalists determine the questions and setting. According to Paletz (2002), an example of *heavy journalistic interference* is a feature report in a newspaper about a politician, since control over the final product—including selection, presentation, framing, and evaluation—rests exclusively with the journalist.

Against this three-way classification of media interventionism, the oft-asserted preference of populist politicians for social media becomes understandable, but further aspects can be added. Many populists consider journalists and "established" mass media to be controlled by the ruling elite; in their view, mainstream political reporting misses the views and interests of "the people," is corrupt and systematically denigrates those politicians who would stand up for the true "will of the people" (Fisher et al. 2018; Moffitt 2016). Three expectations can be derived from this (Krämer 2017): first, populists want to systematically circumvent the mainstream media; second, populists need a platform from which they can criticize the mainstream media as distorted and unfair; and third, they must offer an alternative medium to those citizens they have been able to alienate from the traditional media. This alternative medium are social networks. First, because social media can be used to create protected spaces in which one-sided, anecdotal evidence of populist convictions can be accumulated in large quantities and made accessible to followers. Second, an aggressive, uncivil tone can be cultivated in these spaces because like-minded people feel they can talk to their peers without having to worry about criticism or

social control. Third, the repeated selective exposure to this one-sided information promotes an in-group mentality that populists can use to mobilize their supporters and coordinate political actions (Krämer 2017).

These assumptions of a high affinity between populists and social media have not been put to a hard test yet. Populism research to date still assumes that *talk shows* offer populists the most favorable conditions for spreading their messages. Bos and Brants (2014: 717) found in a long-term analysis spanning twenty years that the populism share was higher in political talk shows than in any other Dutch media genres they examined; they described talk shows as "the most outspoken populist genre." Cranmer (2011) compared different communication settings in Switzerland and concluded, too, that talk shows offer the most effective platform for employing populist communication. However, we find reason to review these findings, as they are based on older studies (without social media) that have not varied the other channels considered systematically (regarding their degrees of journalistic intervention) and only offer case study observations (without comparison of countries).

A core characteristic of populists is their paradoxical relationship to the traditional mass media. Although they criticize the mainstream news on one hand, they need it on the other hand to reach a larger audience and to increase their legitimacy (Haller and Holt 2018). However, the readiness of journalists to offer politicians a favorable platform for conveying their views differs significantly from one media system to another. Some journalistic cultures are friendlier toward politicians than are others (Esser 2008). Politicians must employ clever news management strategies to achieve favorable media treatment in more interventionist journalistic cultures. The newsworthiness of populist actors (Mazzoleni 2008) and their norm-violating behavior (Haller 2015) may trigger journalists to open the news gates for them. However, many European and North American quality media are known to position themselves very critically toward populists in their lead commentaries (Esser et al. 2017).

Overall, our argument follows the theory of media interventionism, according to which it can be expected that the lower the degree of journalistic interference in a channel, the greater the potential for unfiltered, unrestricted populism. This assumption leads to the following expectation:

Hypothesis 1: The degree of populist communication by politicians is highest on social media, followed by political talk shows, and lowest in newspapers.

Populist Affinity of Certain Issues

A second condition favoring the spread of populist communication is the concentration on certain issues in the appeals of populist actors. As populism is conceived as a thin ideology that can be complemented with other host ideologies, it is not restricted to certain parties and can be used by both left-wing and right-wing political actors. We see this fact most clearly in the populist mobilization of the involved issues. Certain issues serve particularly well as vehicles for mobilizing a sort of latent populist possibility. Van Kessel (2015), Poier et al. (2017), Smith (2010) and Taggart (2017) agree

that it is five political issues in particular—*immigration, regional identity, corruption and crime, integration*, and *economic hardship*—that have a specifically high affinity to populist mobilization in Western democracies. Taggart's (2017: 250) hermeneutic analysis found these issues to be "appropriated" and "politicized" most frequently by populist parties in Europe. Van Kessel (2015: 23) ran QCA analyses with thirty-one countries to show that "the breeding ground for populist parties is especially fertile where related issues are salient" in public discourse. Populists put these issues on their agenda and bring them into wider contention, pressurizing the media and other political actors to address these issues also.

According to Taggart (2017), the clearest and most commonly mentioned populist issue is *immigration*, particularly on the political right. Immigration addresses a strong focus on the protection of national culture, an emphasis on the people as homogenous entity, an opposition to multiculturalism, and hostility toward outsiders and ethnic minorities. Second, *regional identity* relates to subnational identity politics; it expresses a rejection of central state structures and the idealization of a regional "heartland" (Taggart 2017). Third, the issue *corruption and crime* relates to allegations of institutional corruption, the failure of established parties, and that law and order policies require tightening (Taggart 2017; Smith 2010). A fourth populist issue addresses *European/transnational integration*, which summarizes populist tendencies to perceive supranational authorities and legal orders as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation (e.g., Euroscepticism; Taggart 2017). Finally, *economic hardship* relates to high unemployment rates and growing economic inequality, and demands to protect the national economy from global competition (Van Kessel 2015). The resulting populist accusations against the elites often come from the political left.

While these five issues are not inherently populist themselves, they often become the subject of populist politicization. (Taggart 2017; Van Kessel 2015). Although several authors discussed the link between these issues and populists' successes, the actual amount of populist communication within these issues has not been analyzed empirically or compared to issues with a low affinity to populism. We expect that due to the high affinity of these issues to populism, statements about them will contain more populist communication elements. Furthermore, because politicians are not restricted in their selection and promotion of issues when speaking on social media, the amount of populist communication related to the five issues above should be highest on Twitter and Facebook. Two hypotheses are tested following these arguments:

Hypothesis 2a: Issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization will contain more populist communication than topics with a comparatively lower mobilization potential.

Hypothesis 2b: Issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization will be especially more likely to contain populist communication when discussed on social media.

Populist Affinity of Certain Groups of Politicians

A third condition that is expected to affect the dissemination of populist communication is the characteristics of politicians. We will discuss two characteristics: affiliation to a populist party and position within the party hierarchy.

Various studies have investigated the question of whether members of populist parties actually communicate in a more populist manner. Both individual country case studies (e.g., Bernhard 2017; Bobba and McDonnell 2016) and some multicountry comparisons (e.g., Bracciale and Martella 2017; Van Kessel 2015) have found supporting evidence for this. However, these studies lack a systematic comparison with members of nonpopulist parties. There are few single country (e.g., Bos and Brants 2014; Cranmer 2011; Jagers and Walgrave 2007) and comparative international studies (e.g., Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Schmidt 2017) that uniformly have measured the proportion of populist communication among a wide variety of political actors. However, these studies again did not test systematically whether members of previously defined populist and nonpopulist parties differ significantly in their level of populist communication.

We want to investigate this question in a more differentiated manner. We want to test not only whether politicians commonly classified as populist actually communicate in a more populist way across several Western democracies but also whether they do so more strongly on social media (and talk shows) to avoid the mainstream media they despise for perceived distorting journalistic intervention and cozy links with the establishment (Fisher et al. 2018). In addition, we want to test whether this tendency of members from populist parties is particularly strong in the context of the five populism-related topics identified above. We expect the following:

Hypothesis 3a: Populist politicians use more populist communications than nonpopulist politicians do.
Hypothesis 3b: Populist politicians use especially more populist communication than nonpopulist politicians do on social media.
Hypothesis 3c: Populist politicians use especially more populist communication than nonpopulist politicians do when talking about issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization.

Another characteristic of politicians could promote their tendency to populist communication. Findings by Davis (2009: 209) indicate that those politicians that do not have the most elevated status (i.e., backbenchers) especially tend to see the exploitation of "populist news values" as an important strategy to overcome the media threshold, in particular on social media where they can communicate their messages directly to the public. Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016: 507) agree that "for backbenchers and newcomers, provocative statements are even more needed." It is noteworthy that their underdog status gives them a certain degree of authenticity. Backbenchers can use the antiestablishment dimension of populist communication particularly effectively by criticizing those in power for political failures and the supposed neglect of the

concerns of the population—and in this way mark their own closeness to the people. Political frontbenchers and power-holders should sound much less convincing if they take a critical stand against the existing political establishment (Stewart 2018). On the party level, studies have shown that parties placed at the fringes of the political spectrum, or holding an opposition or challenger position, employ higher levels of populist communication than do mainstream and governing parties (Ernst et al. 2017; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Schmidt 2017). Building on these findings, we examine the likelihood of populist communication at the individual level of politicians and argue that backbenchers or politicians not holding a key position in a party or government will use more populist communication.

Political outsiders often employ a digital campaign strategy to spread their messages and break into the mainstream media. Backbenchers are less disadvantaged on Facebook and Twitter: they are neither dependent on being invited to talk shows nor on passing journalists' criteria of newsworthiness. Social media even can empower backbenchers: it offers a possibility to build their own power base of like-minded followers, and to establish a more direct and more interactive connection to the people than party leaders have (Jacobs and Spierings 2018; Spierings et al. 2018). Hence, we expect backbenchers to tap their full populist potential particularly via their social media communication. Finally, backbenchers often focus on political issues with high news values—and high mobilization potential—to gain the interest of a wide audience and attract journalist attention. These arguments lead to three final hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: Backbenchers use more populist communication than politicians holding key positions do.
Hypothesis 4b: Backbenchers use especially more populist communication than politicians holding key positions do on social media.
Hypothesis 4c: Backbencher use especially more populist communication than politicians holding key positions do when talking about issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization.

Methods

We conducted a multinational content analysis to measure the prevalence of populist communication of 103 politicians' statements on political talk shows, social media, and newspapers across six countries in 2015. In total, the study analyzed 2,517 statements by politicians from a broad spectrum of parties.

Sample

Populist communication is a transnational phenomenon (Aalberg et al. 2017; Moffitt 2016), and populist actors in many Western countries are on the rise. This study examines six news systems (United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany) to capture the phenomenon more broadly and go beyond case study observations. We followed an individual matching approach on the actor level across

several media channels to analyze the hypotheses. This sampling strategy required a four-step procedure: We (1) identified relevant countries, (2) sampled political talk shows and recorded all statements from the appearing politicians, (3) downloaded the verified social media statements from the politicians, and (4) collected all statements in newspapers from the same politicians during the period of investigation.

First, we selected six countries spanning the three relevant models of Western media system types: democratic-corporatist versus polarized-pluralist versus liberal (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In addition, these countries provide sufficient variability regarding political systems (parliamentary vs. presidential, representative vs. direct, consensus vs. majoritarian systems), party characteristics (strong vs. weak populist parties), and consumer preferences for various political information sources (Aalberg et al. 2017; Newman et al. 2017). Our multinational comparative design serves as a robustness check for the validity and generalizability of our findings and allows us to draw conclusions for a wider scope of countries.

Second, we selected the two most influential political talk shows for each country that air on a weekly basis and enjoy high viewing figures and market shares in their segments (Table A in the online appendix). All shows focus primarily on politics, follow a roundtable format, have a duration of approximately one hour[1] and regularly invite politicians as panel guests. We recorded four episodes of the twelve selected shows during a three-month period of routine news (with no interfering elections) from March through May 2015. We content-analyzed only statements made by politicians and neglected all statements made by talk show hosts, nonpolitical guests or audience members. This led to a selection of 110 political actors across the forty-eight taped programs.

Third, we collected the verified Facebook posts and Twitter feeds[2] of all identified politicians during the same three-month period when the talk shows were recorded.[3] We considered only tweets and Facebook posts that included direct statements from the respective politician and were more than eight characters long. Simple retweets and tweets or Facebook posts including only pictures, links or videos were excluded from the analysis. We drew a random sample of fifty Twitter and fifty Facebook statements per politician.

Fourth, we collected direct and indirect statements of the 110 identified politicians in the newspapers. We selected two leading upmarket daily newspapers (one left- and one right-leaning), two dominant mass-market media newspapers (either paid or free) and two important weekly news magazines for each country (see Table B in the online appendix). We retrieved all stories that these newspapers had published, including statements from these politicians within the wider debates of migration and labor market by using a verified search string for Lexis Nexis and Factiva. The sample period for the press was extended to twelve months (March 2014 to May 2015) to ensure a sufficient number of statements by the individual politicians in the sample.[4]

Out of the initial sample, we kept only those statements that included a veritable statement by a politician and expressed either a political position, an elaboration on a political issue, an evaluation, or an attribution from a target actor ($N = 2{,}549$). We further excluded politicians with less than five statements in total. This led to a final

sample of $N = 990$ talk show statements, $N = 363$ tweets, $N = 708$ Facebook posts, and $N = 456$ newspaper statements by 103 politicians.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is a single statement made by a politician—who is considered a *speaker*—about a target actor or a political issue. A *target actor* is the object of a politician's characterization or evaluation and may include politicians, members of the elite or the people. A political *issue* refers to the thematic context or policy substance of the statement.

Operationalization

Populist Communication

The nine populist key messages and seven populist communication styles were coded based on a comprehensive codebook (see Table 1 and Table 2 for details on the categories). For each category, we recorded whether the variable was present in a statement. A message or style was considered present if at least one of the related categories was coded. For the dependent variable—populist communication, which we theoretically defined as the co-occurrence of populist content and style—we constructed a dummy variable, which was present if at least one of the nine populist key messages and one of seven populist communication styles cooccurred in the same statement.

Issues

Each statement made on social media, talk shows or in newspapers was coded for its connection to one of the following fourteen issue specifications: Economy, welfare, budget, freedom and rights, Europe, education, immigration, army, security, ecology, institutional reforms, infrastructure, elections, and events. Each of these fourteen issues has a variety of subissues that were also coded ($n = 133$). The fourteen issues were divided into two groups—issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization and issues with a low affinity to populism—by following specifications by Taggart (2017), Van Kessel (2015), Smith (2010) and Poier et al. (2017). The dummy for populism-affine issues included forty-seven subissues related to immigration, regionalism, corruption and crime, integration, and economic hardship.

Politicians

Each of the 103 politicians was categorized for populist versus nonpopulist and backbencher versus holding a key position. In terms of identifying populist actors, we rely on previous categorizations made by Van Kessel (2015), Mudde (2007), Rooduijn et al. (2014) as well as the respective country chapters in Aalberg et al. (2017). The populist politicians appearing in the talk shows programs we taped came from the

Swiss People's Party (SVP), the German Alternative for Germany (AfD), the German Leftist Party (Die Linke), the Italian Northern League (LN), the Five Star Movement (M5S), Forward Italy (FI), or the U.K. Independence Party (UKIP). In total, eighteen populist politicians were identified.

In a second step, we coded the official political position of each politician during the sample period. We categorized politicians as holding a key position who were in office as the head of government (e.g., president, chancellor, or federal council), ministers of the current cabinet, or a party or vice-party leader. In total, twenty-eight politicians were categorized as holding key positions and seventy-five politicians were backbenchers.

A team of intensively trained student coders reached acceptable levels of reliability across all coding categories. The average Brennan and Prediger's kappa across all populist messages, styles and political issues is .89 (see Table C in the online appendix for details).

Findings

Of the 2,517 statements we found across the four channels (Facebook, Twitter, TV talk shows, newspapers), roughly every seventh statement (15.3 percent) contains a populist key message, and roughly every third (37.2 percent) contains a populist style element. The proportion of statements in which politicians combine a key message with a style element is 9.3 percent. This figure gives us an idea of how widespread the use of populist communication is among Western politicians and how often we as media consumers are confronted with it on average (see Table D in the online appendix for further details).

We conducted analyses of variance using the co-occurrence of populist key messages and communication styles as the dependent variable to test our nine hypotheses. The independent variables (channel type, issue type, politician type) change depending on the hypothesis for the individual analyses. We ran *Bonferroni-corrected* post hoc tests ($p < .01$) to analyze the differences further between groups.

Hypothesis 1: Type of Channel

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the amount of populist communication is highest on social media (both Twitter and Facebook), followed by talk shows, and lowest in newspapers. Although the channel type has a significant main effect, $(3,2513) = 10.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$, it is the newspapers of all places where we found the highest proportion of populist statements by politicians in the form of direct or indirect speech ($M = .15$, $SD = .35$). The politicians of all six countries appear to succeed surprisingly well in getting populist messages into the news columns of major newspapers. Populist politicians seem quite adept in overcoming the journalists' filter and selection mechanisms.[5] We found smaller shares of politicians' populist communication on Facebook ($M = .11$, $SD = .32$), Twitter ($M = .07$, $SD = .26$) and talk shows ($M = .06$, $SD = .24$); the difference between newspapers and Twitter or talk shows is statistically highly significant (see Figure 1). Overall, H1 is disconfirmed.

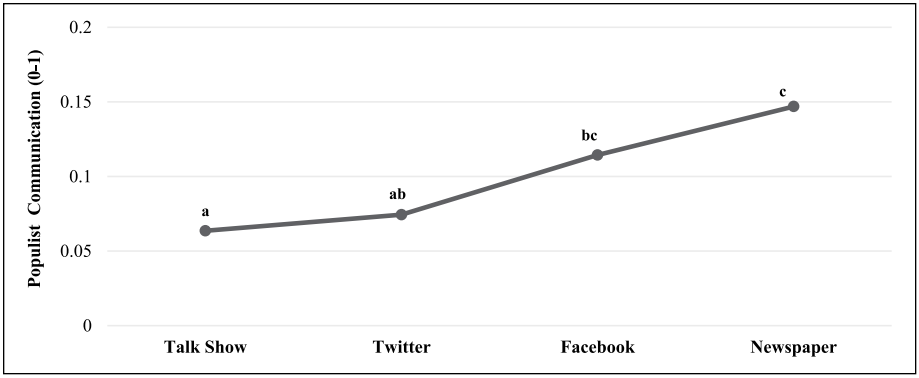

Figure 1. Populist communication across type of media channels.
Note. Type of channel: $F(3,2513) = 10.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$.

If we look at the conditions in the six countries examined separately, we found (with regard to the media system typology of Hallin and Mancini 2004) for democratic-corporatist and polarized-pluralist media systems the same pattern as shown in Figure 1, but a slightly different picture for the liberal media systems. In the United States and United Kingdom, the share of populist statements by politicians is also highest in newspapers but is closely followed by the share in talk shows; only then follow Facebook and Twitter. It seems that talk shows in the United States and United Kingdom have a higher level of tolerance for populist discourses than in continental European countries.

Hypotheses 2: Type of Issue

Hypothesis 2a argued that issues claimed by populists to be "in their possession" are more frequently the subject of populist politicization than are other issues—and that this is particularly evident in social media communication (H2b). H2a is supported ($F(1,2509) = 7.36$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .003$). Political statements on the five key topics of immigration, regionalism, corruption and crime, integration and economic hardship contain on average ($M = .11$, $SD = .31$) more populism than do statements on topics that we classified as nonpopulist ($M = .08$, $SD = .28$). All three types of Western media systems show the same pattern. In addition to the main effect, we also found a significant interaction effect between populist issue and channel type ($F(3,2509) = 3.52$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .004$). Post-hoc tests revealed that politicians, in line with the expectation of H2b, communicate on Twitter and Facebook in a much more populist way on the five key topics than they do on the other channels (see Figure 2).

Where politicians are confronted with a higher degree of journalistic intervention in political talk shows and newspapers, they succeed significantly less often in actually communicating in a populist manner on topics classified as populist. Although we found in the previous step of the analysis that the proportion of populist communication

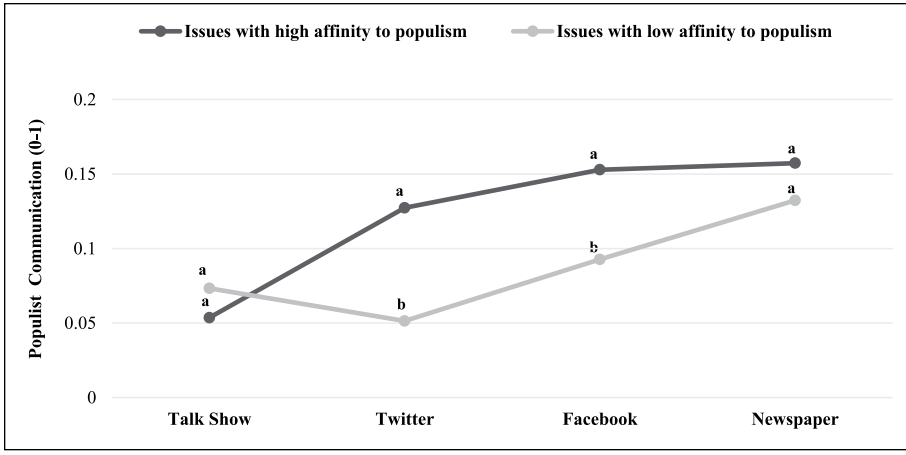

Figure 2. Degree of populist communication in statements about political issues
Note. Type of political issue: $F(1,2509) = 7.36$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .003$/ Type of channel: $F(3,2509) = 10.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .012$/ Type of political issue*Type of channel: $F(3,2509) = 3.52$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$.

is highest in newspapers, news journalists select populist statements regardless of whether they write stories on a populist or nonpopulist topic.

Hypotheses 3: Type of Party

We suspected a difference between members of populist and nonpopulist parties in their use of populist communication (H3a), especially in statements on social media (H3b) and in statements on the five populist-related topics (H3c). The significant main effect supports H3a ($F(1,2509) = 22,38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .009$) and demonstrates that members of populist parties use more populist key messages and style elements ($M = .14$, $SD = .29$) than do members of nonpopulist parties ($M = .08$, $SD = .26$). Single country comparisons suggest that this effect is robust across all three media system types.[6]

Furthermore, we find indications of an interaction effect between type of party and channel use ($F(3,2509) = 2.25$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .003$). If we compare the different channel types using post hoc tests, we find that members of populist parties make intensive use of one of the two social media channels for populist communication[7] but that they are also very successful at breaking into the coverage of the news media with their messages and styles. This finding, graphically displayed in Figure 3, only can be read as a partial and weak confirmation of H3b.

Hypothesis 3c must be rejected because we find no significant interaction between affiliation to a certain party group and the way populism-related topics are addressed ($F(1,2513) = .53$, *ns*). Members of populist parties do not address issues with a high affinity to populist mobilization per se in a more populist manner than do members of other parties.

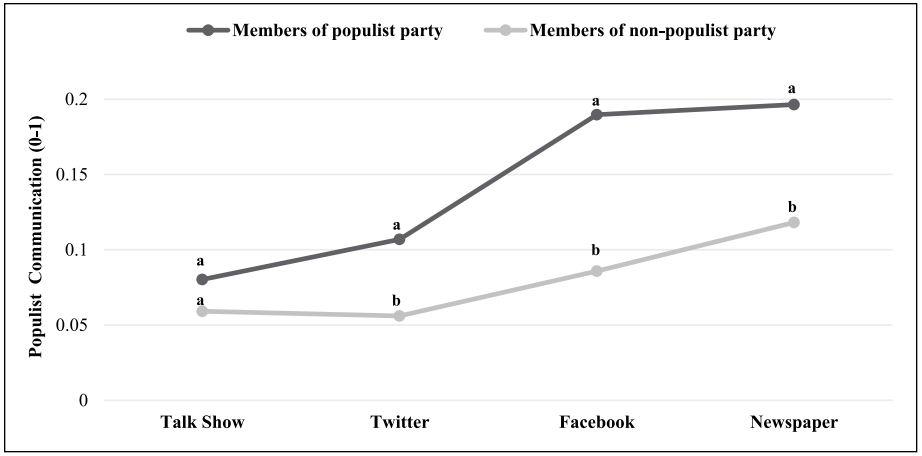

Figure 3. Degree of populist communication by political parties.
Note. Type of political party: F(1,2509) = 22,38, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .009$/ Type of channel: F(3,2509) = 10.89, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .013$/ Type of political party*Type of channel: F(3,2509) = 2.25, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .003$.

Hypotheses 4: Type of Politician

Finally, we expected that backbenchers are more populist than politicians holding a leadership position (H4a), in particular when communicating via social media channels (H4b) and addressing populism-affine topics (H4c). We find a significant main effect that backbenchers ($M = .10$, $SD = .30$) are more populist in their communication than are high-ranking politicians ($M = .09$, $SD = .29$/$F(1,2509) = 6.44$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .003$). The differences between the two groups are small[8] but in all probability would have been larger if we had considered "real" backbenchers; after all, our backbenchers were invited to talk shows, otherwise they would not have been included in the sample. Country comparisons further reveal that our backbenchers used significantly more populist communication in Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and France. Frontbenchers used more populism in their statements in Switzerland and the United States. H3a thus finds only partial support. At a second view, this finding makes much sense because many populist politicians in Switzerland and the United States are in leadership positions of large parties with partial governmental responsibility.

The significant interaction of backbenchers and type of channel (F(3,2509) = 3.02, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$) supports H4b. Post hoc tests reveal that backbenchers communicate in a much more populist way on Twitter and Facebook[9] in comparison to those in the other two channels (see Figure 4). As expected, backbenchers particularly are keen to use social media and especially Twitter for their populist communication because there they can demonstrate particularly well their responsiveness to the alleged will of the people.

Hypothesis H4c is not supported because no significant interaction effect exists between the type of politician and their populist communication of certain issues

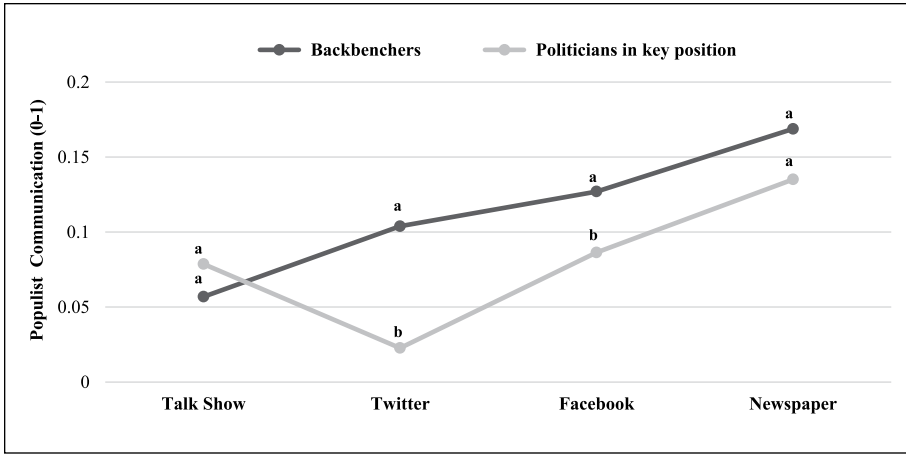

Figure 4. Degree of populist communication by politicians.
Note. Type of politician: F(1,2509) = 6,44, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .003$)/ Type of channel: F(3,2509) = 9.43, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .011$/ Type of politician*Type of channel: F(3,2509) = '3.02, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$.

(F(1,2513) = .01, *ns*). Politicians in general use populist messages and styles much more often when they address populist issues; however, this is not more pronounced for backbenchers.

Multivariate Analysis of Opportunity Structures

To validate these findings further, we integrated all variables of the individual analyses of variance (ANOVAs) into a comprehensive binary logistic regression model (see Table 3) by using the dummy variable for populist communication as dependent variable and considering all channel, issue, party, and politician types as dummies for the independent variables. Additionally, we controlled for differences between the different types of media systems. The multivariate model confirms that populist communication is highly prevalent in newspapers and for members of populist parties. While the main effect for backbenchers is no longer significant, the interactions demonstrate that they use one preferred social media channel—Twitter—for their populist communication. The effects for populism-related issues stay robust when circulated on Facebook and the model overall reinforces the argument that social media channels in combination with other opportunity structures promote the spread of populism.

A final word on country differences: The previous ANOVAs had shown that politicians in all six countries find very similar opportunity structures for populist communication. The only notable country differences were (1) talk shows, where U.S. and U.K. politicians are allowed to express themselves more populist than in the other countries, and (2) frontbenchers, who communicate in an even more populist way than backbenchers in the United States and Switzerland. The main, overarching country difference is also reflected in the multivariate regression (Table 3): the share of popu-

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression of Populist Communication ($N = 2{,}517$).

	Populist Communication		
	B	*SE*	*Odds Ratio*
Constant	3.04***	0.31	0.05
Liberal media system (vs. democratic corporatist)	0.56***	0.18	1.74
Polarized media system (vs. democratic corporatist)	0.32	0.20	1.37
Twitter (vs. talk show)	−1.33*	0.63	0.27
Facebook (vs. talk show)	−0.25	0.36	0.78
Newspapers (vs. talk show)	0.83***	0.20	2.30
Populist issue	−0.29	0.27	0.75
Populist Issue × Twitter	0.83	0.49	2.30
Populist Issue × Facebook	0.82**	0.32	2.28
Populist party	0.54*	0.26	1.72
Populist Party × Twitter	−0.35	0.49	0.71
Populist Party × Facebook	0.49	0.32	1.64
Populist Party × Populist Issue	0.24	0.29	1.28
Backbencher	−0.02	0.25	0.98
Backbencher × Twitter	1.48*	0.69	4.40
Backbencher × Facebook	0.47	0.35	1.59
Backbencher × Populist Issue	0.20	0.31	1.22
Nagelkerke R^2		.07***	

Note. Likelihood-Ratio-Test: $\chi^2(16) = 1{,}489.3$, $p < .001$
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

list communication is higher in liberal Anglo-American media systems than in continental European ones.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study's main contribution to the international political communication literature is that we link populism research with a discursive opportunity approach. With regard to favorable opportunities, we studied the role of different *types of politicians, parties, issues*, and *communication channels*. We find that members of populist parties rely more frequently on the combination of populism-related key messages and stylistic elements than do members of mainstream parties. This is the case in every tenth of their statements, and particularly often on social media and in news articles. Backbenchers can rely less on invitations to TV talk shows and make therefore greater use of social media channels and their contacts to press journalists. While frontbenchers rely more on Facebook, backbenchers use Twitter for populist communication.

We no longer can prove the *talk show bonus* claimed in the literature under today's multichannel conditions. Populists now use more social media and have become more successful in getting their messages in the *news columns* of newspapers. This

observation is perhaps the most surprising finding of our study. How is it possible that the supposedly interventionist news media report so extensively on populism statements by politicians? We believe there are seven explanations for this.

First, populist politicians often have a so-called news value bonus because their messages are controversial, spectacular, and taboo-breaking—and thus meet the selection criteria of the media (Mazzoleni 2008). Second, their messages often take extreme positions on hotly debated issues for which populists claim ownership and problem-solving competence—and for which journalists feel obliged to open the news gates for reasons of balance (Esser et al. 2017). Third, journalists pay very close attention to what populist politicians say on other channels and incorporate this into their newspaper articles (Rogstad 2016). Fourth, populist politicians do not use social media only "to bypass" traditional news media but above all "to influence" the news media agenda with their posts and tweets—as Trump exemplified in the 2016 presidential election campaign (Chadwick 2017: 263). Fifth, we confirm the "paradox of populist communication," according to which populists may publicly condemn the traditional media on one hand, but on the other hand regard any confirmation by them as the greatest possible triumph (Haller and Holt 2018). Sixth, the news media include many populist messages in their news articles to criticize and deconstruct them. In our sample, for example, 56 percent of the news articles offered populists a neutral platform, whereas 44 percent offered a critical discussion. In these latter articles, the majority of the criticism came from the journalists themselves, not from quoted sources. Many populist political statements in newspaper articles are thus embedded in a critical context, and we consider this a clear expression of the undiminished persistence of journalistic interventionism. However, many journalists have been frustrated to learn that populists follow the principle of "There is no such thing as bad publicity," because populists like to use every instance of media criticism as proof that news journalists are part of the opposing elite and deserve to be scorned for it. Seventh, the higher proportion of populist politician quotes in the newspaper sample could be related to our methodology. As a result of our sampling strategy, there are more statements on the topics of migration and labor market (45 percent) in the newspaper sample than in talk shows (41 percent) or on Facebook (33 percent) or Twitter (21 percent), which theoretically could increase the populism share.

This brings us to the limitations of the study. Due to our specific sampling strategy, which takes its starting point in talk shows, our sample does not include politicians who generally avoid talk shows or were not invited on them during the period under study. This led to the under-representation of not only Front National members but also of populists and backbenchers as a whole in our sample. We call for future studies to replicate our findings with larger numbers of cases, considering more politicians from an even wider variety of parties, more media channels and more countries. The generalizations that can be drawn from our sample thus are limited somewhat. One final limitation is that we have only analyzed statements by politicians (direct and indirect quotes) in detail; how they were integrated in news stories was examined only roughly. Future studies should examine the contribution by journalists in much greater depth.

Nevertheless, we are convinced we have made a significant contribution to understanding the beneficial opportunity structures for populist communication under

multichannel conditions with this study. We can demonstrate that politicians indeed address populism-related issues in a more populist way than other issues. Populist politicians who raise these issues have been surprisingly successful in getting their messages into the news media. As many as half of these messages are transmitted uncritically. Populists turn to their own followers via social media. It may be that populists use Facebook and Twitter not only to bypass the news media but also to influence them. These findings broaden our understanding of the communication strategies of populist politicians.

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Notes

1. Italian Servizio Pubblico and Ballarò are an exception, with an airtime of approximately 170 minutes.
2. In the final analysis, only ten politicians had no Facebook or Twitter account.
3. We extended the study period to the whole year for politicians who had less than 100 tweets or Facebook posts during the three-month period.
4. The reason why only newspaper articles with a loose connection to migration and the labor market were available to us was that this study is part of larger research program.
5. To better understand politicians' great chances of success in the *news media*, we examined the frequency of populist political statements in upmarket newspapers ($M = .13$, $SD = .33$), mass-market ($M = .13$, $SD = .34$) and weekly magazines ($M = .23$, $SD = .42$). It turns out that weekly magazines are the most receptive: almost one in four direct and indirect quotes by politicians are populist in nature. The high affinity of weekly newspapers for popularizing and populist communication had already been shown in earlier studies (Umbricht and Esser 2016; Wettstein et al. 2018).
6. We could not run these analyses for France and the United States because of too few members of populist parties in the sample.
7. We can only report a tendency for Twitter ($p = 0.10$)
8. The differences are no longer significant when tested in a single analysis of variance.
9. For Facebook we can only report a tendency ($p = 0.09$), but the preferred use of Twitter by backbenchers is well-known (Rogstad 2016).

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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